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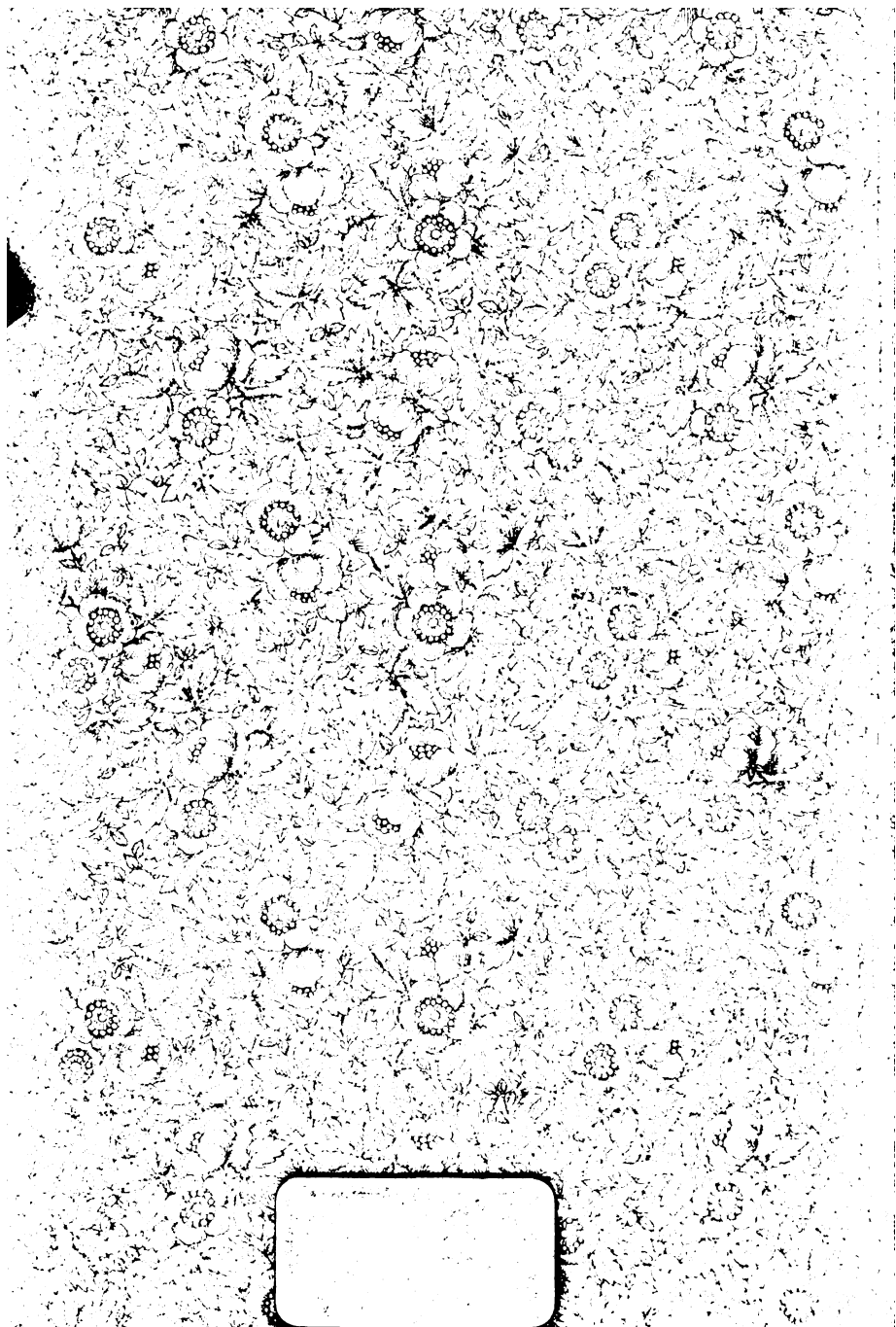
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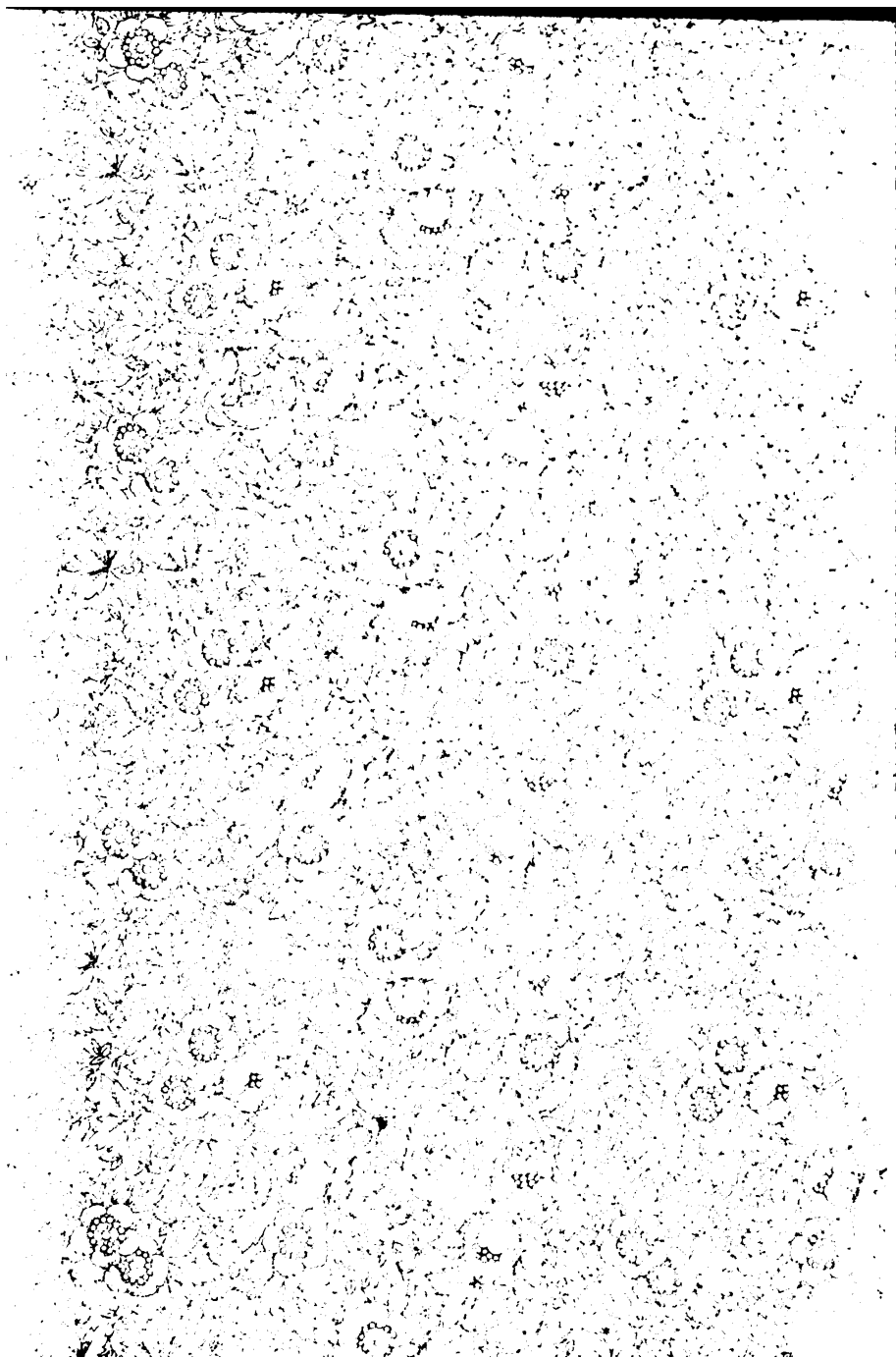
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THREE FAIR DAUGHTERS:

A NOVEL.

BY

LAURENCE BROOKE,

AUTHOR OF THE 'QUEEN OF TWO WORLDS,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THREE FAIR DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNWELCOME INTERRUPTION.

I CAN'T stand this much longer ;
I'll go back next week. It
will be better, for many
reasons.'

Such was the stern resolution arrived at by Lenore on the day after that unsuccessful picnic, as she sat in a secluded spot by the river, silently reviewing her position. She had stolen out here for a quiet think, having displayed great

2 *An Unwelcome Interruption.*

art in escaping the attentions of Sir Timothy and Farquhar, each of whom had proposed to himself the pleasure of securing her society for the interval between afternoon tea and dinner.

Whose mellow baritone was that that suddenly disturbed the silence with the sonorous strains of 'Nancy Lee'? Neither the baronet nor the lieutenant boasted such a rich and melodious organ. Her heart beat just a trifle faster as she recognised in the singer Keith Luttrell. He would not see her, for a protecting barrier of shrubs screened her from view. He would pass on, of course; he would never dream of looking over that flowering screen. Well, solitude had its charms, and she came out here on purpose to be quiet and to think. And yet, if she were to give a slight cough, or turn over the leaves of her book noisily, he was so near that he must hear her. No,

she dared not do that ; it would be too obvious a signal.

Nature kindly solved the difficulty for her, and gave her her heart's desire without any injury to her modesty. A sudden and loud sneeze proclaimed her presence to the gentleman who was so near, and who, but for that providential warning, would soon have been so far.

The next moment Keith Luttrell's curly brown head popped over the shrubs.

' I knew by the sneeze that so gracefully rang
Through the heart of the woods, that a maiden
was here,'

cried the intruder, with unmistakable pleasure in his tones. 'Am I *de trop* ? If not, may I rest my wearied limbs upon the same spot of earth ?'

Her silence gave consent. Mr Luttrell came round and leisurely deposited himself upon the grass. By the time that he had

settled himself to his satisfaction, Lenore had recovered from her first confusion, and was able to address him with a perfect freedom from embarrassment.

‘Where are Sir Timothy and Mr Farquhar?’ she asked.

‘I have not seen those two nice little boys since lunch. They are probably reading Jack the Giant-Killer together, or some other tale suited to their infantine understandings.’

‘Why do you speak of them in that fashion? They are as much men as you.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr Luttrell mildly; ‘the force of compliment can go no further.’

‘What do you see to laugh at in them?’

‘They are really *so* young; they show their feelings *and* their temper with such perfect frankness. And really,’ added Mr Luttrell, with an easy laugh, ‘the desper-

ate pertinacity with which they press their attentions upon you, and your—not very encouraging reception of them, is a humorous thing to witness.'

'They are very stupid,' observed Lenore, colouring.

'I would pity them if they were not such odious monopolists,' he said, with a glance that made the roses in her cheeks grow rosier. 'But they have no idea of such a thing as free-trade in admiration. For instance, they could hang, draw, and quarter your humble servant for daring to think as they do upon the same subject.'

It was the boldest speech he had yet ventured to make to her; and the fearless blue eyes, that had never faltered beneath a man's gaze before, dared not meet his as he gave utterance to it.

'Let us talk of something else,' she said, in quick, nervous tones. 'Tell me about yourself—your career.'

In her confusion she failed to see that this very request was flattering. But he saw it, and in his smile there was a certain joyful triumph as he made answer,—

‘I am a most uninteresting person. I was born; I went to school; I proceeded to Oxford. I came into possession of my small property. I have killed time in various ways since then, by travelling, lounging, etc.

‘What! no adventures, no romantic incidents? And you have reached the mature age of thirty?’

‘I fear I am but a poor creature,’ admitted Mr Luttrell candidly. ‘I give you leave to despise me.’

‘Why did you not go in for something?’

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘If I had gone into the army, I should have required to become a general at least; nothing short of that would have satisfied me. If I had chosen the church, I must have been a

bishop ; if the law, a judge at least. Now, they don't make men generals, bishops, and judges till their heads are grey. I couldn't wait for such slow promotion, I am of too impatient a temperament. So I have gone in for nothing ; and now, like the æsthetic gentleman in *Punch*, I am content "to exist beautifully."

There was silence between them for some time after this satisfactory explanation. Then presently Lenore said merrily,—

'I believe you are dying for a smoke. There is a pathetic expression about you which I've seen on papa's face when he wants to smoke, and dares not, for fear of outraging the proprieties. Don't mind me. Papa has accustomed all us girls to tobacco fumes.'

'I respect him greatly for his comprehensive system of female education,' said Mr Luttrell seriously. 'Since you give me a dispensation, I will light up.'

8 *An Unwelcome Interruption.*

‘And now I will tell you a piece of news,’ she said, when her companion had fairly started a cigar. ‘I am going home next week.’

Man of the world as he was, and accustomed to keep his thoughts to himself, his countenance fell at the information.

‘I am so sorry. I think—I think I shall take myself off shortly after,’ he observed presently.

She was too innocent, too inexperienced to attempt to parry this meaning speech with the easy badinage that would have suggested itself readily to a seasoned coquette. She could only look a picture of sweet confusion, and confess to herself that this man’s avowal of her power to attract him stirred her young heart as it had never been stirred before.

‘But I suppose this will not be our last meeting?’ he went on, in a voice

whose earnestness convinced her that he was not indulging in the mere language of compliment. 'I shall come across you, perhaps, in the modern Babylon. Our positions will, of course, be very different,' —in a lighter tone, in which, however, her quick ears could detect a ring of bitterness, or at least regret. 'You will be the Queen of Beauty, the admired of all beholders. I shall be an insignificant unit in the vast crowd. But, poor, aimless drone as I am, shall I be too presumptuous in hoping that you will condescend to remember me? Will you call me impertinent if I venture to remind you of the day when I woke you from your pleasant dreams?'

She looked up at him, but read that in his eyes which made her look quickly away again.

'I don't think we shall meet in London,' she answered hastily. 'Have you

not heard—has not Selina told you that we have fallen upon evil times?’

‘No ; I knew nothing of it. I am very grieved for your sake.’

He could not do less than offer the conventional sympathy that such a statement would demand from the greatest stranger. But as he offered it there was a strange light on his face, a light that told of selfish gladness. Had she been a rich man’s child, he felt that the gulf between them must ever be impassable. But if she had fallen upon evil times as she phrased it, there might be hope for him.

Then a fresh thought suddenly occurred to him, and chilled him anew. ‘Sir Herbert will probably give you a handsome place in his will. Why should he not ? Your claim is very nearly as good as that of your cousins. And he cannot live very long now.’

‘I don’t think there is much chance of

that. One of our family offended him a long time ago ; and my uncle, if all accounts are true, has a keen memory for insults. Shall I tell you how it happened ?'

'Do,' said Mr Luttrell eagerly, leaning a little closer towards her, with the intention probably of not losing a syllable which should fall from her lips.

But just as she was about to embark upon the history of young Sydney's fiasco, the sound of footsteps caused them both to start and turn their heads.

It was Selina and Robert Farquhar who had discovered their resting-place. Now, Lenore and her companion were certainly not committing any act of which they need have been ashamed. The day was warm ; the spot in which they had ensconced themselves was cool and umbrageous, and there was not the slightest reason in the world why they should not enjoy a comfortable chat together.

All the same, to a third person there was a decided flavour of sentiment about the whole scene. The admiration with which he had been regarding her for some time, had not yet died out of his eyes when Selina and her cavalier popped upon them thus unexpectedly. Upon Lenore's ingenuous countenance there was a conscious glow. If she had caught Selina and Luttrell sitting together so cosily, she would at once have accused them of love-making, and of course she could not expect Selina to be more charitable than herself under similar circumstances.

Selina was the first to speak, and her voice was cold and sneering. 'A thousand pardons for disturbing you. I think, Mr Farquhar,' turning to her cavalier, 'we may as well continue our stroll.'

'Oh, don't go,' cried poor Lenore, hardly knowing what she said in her con-

fusion. 'Sit down with us ; four is such a nice, comfortable number, you know.'

Selina's reply was accompanied by a disdainful smile. 'Four is a good number for a rubber at whist, or a quadrille, but not for anything else that I am aware of.'

There was an awkward silence after this. Selina continued to regard them in her most supercilious manner. Bob Farquhar, a chilly feeling about the region of his heart—for was there not a *look* of incipient love-making about the pair?—was gazing steadfastly at the female culprit with mournful, questioning eyes. Lenore felt herself growing redder and redder.

Then Mr Luttrell pulled himself together and spoke.

'Awfully hot, isn't it?' he said brilliantly, by way of beginning conversation.

Selina's smile was, if possible, more disdainful than ever.

‘I really can’t say that the heat seems to me anything extraordinary.’

This was a facer. If she had agreed with him, there would have been an opening for further dialogue. The talk might have become general, and their temporary embarrassment have evaporated during its progress. But such a flat contradiction seemed to check the genial current of further speech. Mr Luttrell pulled his moustache with a meditative air, and then turned in desperation to Farquhar.

‘Don’t *you* think it’s awfully hot?’ he asked, in a voice that made the question sound like a prayer.

For once in his life, soft-hearted, good-natured Bob was guilty of cruelty—of refined cruelty. For once in his blameless career, he struck the prostrate foe.

‘Seems to me a delightful temperate day. But I must admit you two do look precious hot—as if you had been in a sun-bath.’

Poor fellow ! he repented the gibe as soon as he had given utterance to it, for Lenore flashed at him only one look, but it said plainly as words,—‘ Bob, you are a mean-spirited cur to mock me with that cold-blooded Selina standing by, and I hate you for it.’

Miss Partlet turned towards the lieutenant with a laugh that was a sneer. ‘ Suppose we leave them to get cool again, Mr Farquhar ?’ And Bob had to follow her, with that last vivid flash of Lenore’s for a memory.

‘ They seemed rather a spiteful pair, don’t you think ?’ observed Luttrell, when the intruders were well out of earshot.

‘ The fact is, they wanted this snug little place for themselves,’ cried Lenore, spite and vexation getting the better of her common-sense, ‘ and they were in a blind rage because they found us here before

them. I *hate* such mean ways, don't you ?'

'I hate everything you hate, and love everything you love,' he answered, with a glance that sent the rosy blood to her foolish cheek for about the twentieth time during the course of that eventful *tête-à-tête*.

When she returned to the house an hour later, *alone*—for she had had the good sense to hint to Mr Luttrell that he might as well stay where he was and enjoy another pipe by himself,—she had still not recovered from her feeling of chagrin at having been found out. As fate would have it, she came across Bob Farquhar pacing moodily up and down on the lawn in front of the terrace, and the sight of him added fresh fuel to her indignation, by reminding her of the shabby part he had played in that embarrassing comedy.

Her first impulse was to ignore his

presence, and pass him by with a look of disdain that should wither him to the earth. What was the use of long friendship if it did not confer on her the privilege of behaving rudely to him? Her second was to stop and have it out, and communicate to him, in plain, unvarnished terms, her opinion of his behaviour.

‘I believe you always gave me reason to look upon you as a friend,’ she began, with scornful emphasis. ‘You acted a very friendly part towards me just now, didn’t you?’

If she expected him to be crushed then and there by her indignation, she must have been grievously disappointed. Farquhar’s face did not move a muscle; his eyes never drooped for a second before the scornful light of her own.

‘Will you have the kindness to explain yourself,’ he said, in a cold voice.

‘Don’t play the hypocrite, Robert Far-

quhar ; you know well enough to what I allude. It was mean and shabby of you to stand there as you did, aiding and abetting that spiteful Selina, and sneering at us. If you had been my friend, as you pretend, you would have given me a helping hand, instead of adding to my confusion by a series of stony stares.'

'I may be your friend, but I am certainly not Mr Luttrell's,' answered Farquhar slowly, and there was a richness of hate in the scorn with which he spoke his rival's name that did not escape her ear. 'It was no part of my business to endorse his idiotic remarks ; and as you allowed him to lead you into an embarrassing position, neither was it my business to extricate you from it.'

'I presume, Mr Farquhar, that I am not accountable to you for my actions,' she said haughtily. 'I take it that I am

at liberty to choose my companions, and to spend my afternoons where I please.'

'You will perhaps do me the justice to remember that I have never set up any claim of the sort you refer to,' he replied, with equal haughtiness. 'At the same time I must protest against your endeavouring to pick a quarrel with me. You wander away to a sufficiently out-of-the-way spot with a gentleman for whose society you have evidently a strong predilection. By mere chance I come upon you together, and you don't like it. It may be natural on your part not to like it, but it is equally natural on *my* part to fail to see that I have committed any offence. Do you think it was a *pleasure* for me to intrude upon you?' he asked bitterly.

'I wouldn't have minded if it had only been *you*,' she said, in a less decided tone, for the bitterness in his voice touched her

more than he was aware of; 'but it was so maddening to see Selina stand there with that fixed sneer on her cold face, and you seeming to applaud her.'

'Did it ever occur to you that Selina might have some reason to complain? You didn't expect her to relish coming upon her lover engaged in such an apparently interesting *tête-à-tête* with another woman?'

'He isn't her lover; he never was,' cried Lenore indignantly. 'What put such a foolish notion into your head?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'She always seems to appropriate him in a way suggestive of proprietorship.'

'Foolish people might think we were lovers,' she said contemptuously. 'At any rate, it is a very private arrangement, if your suspicions are correct, and one which he evidently does not seem to consider binding on himself.'

'Evidently not,' observed Farquhar,

with another shrug. He paused a moment, and then added,—‘If you have nothing more to say upon the subject, I will wish you good-day.’

He spoke in a very cold, collected voice—so calmly, indeed, that you would not have believed he was the same man who had shown his heart so plainly a few moments before. If he had been angry, or rude, or violent, Lenore would have allowed him to depart without a word. But this apparently indifferent treatment worked a revulsion in her own feelings. It seemed a very hard thing if he was going to turn her enemy after all their long years of friendship.

‘Bob, why are you so unkind to me?’ she asked, her lip quivering just a little.

‘I am not unkind to you, child,’ he answered, in a low voice.

‘Yes, you are. You looked as black as a thunderbolt when you came upon us

with Selina. I am sure I was doing no harm. I went there by myself to read a book, and Mr Luttrell found me out by accident. I happened to sneeze just as he was passing, or he would never have known I was there. I couldn't tell him to go away, you know.'

'You wouldn't have told him if you could.'

She cast down her eyes before his steady, questioning gaze.

'Well, Bob, you had no *right* to be cross about it, or to *show* your temper as you did. For, of course, that remark about our both looking hot *was* temper. I certainly think you ought to beg my pardon.'

For a moment Farquhar kept silence, with a strange look on his face—a wistful, pained look that she could not fail to read aright. Then he came close to her and laid a hand upon her shoulder, speaking sadly and gently.

‘Lenore, when a man who loves a woman with all his heart, and has been fool enough to cheat himself into the belief that he will one day win her love, makes the discovery that her heart is not only shut against him, but has opened itself to another, you cannot expect that man to hide his pain all at once. It was such a discovery I made to-day. If it had been a mere flirtation, a passing fancy, I would have made light of it, and helped you out of it, as you seem to think I ought to have done. But when I saw you sitting there together, I read it at a glance.’

‘Read what?’ she asked falteringly.

‘The dawning of the love that you cannot give to me. You love that man, Lenore, and when he asks you to be his wife you will say Yes. God bless you, child; I can wish you happiness now—for I should be a cur to begrudge an-

other what I cannot win myself. But I am only mortal, and in the first bitter moment of finding out the truth, I hated him as I never hated a human being before.'

For a long time she could not speak a word. He had guessed her secret, read it perchance in her tell-tale eyes; and it was idle to deny it. And then for the first time she could understand the misery of his hopeless longing, because for the first time the knowledge of what true love meant had been revealed to her own heart. She slid her little hand in his, and the tears were standing in her eyes as she spoke.

'Bob, dear,'—she had never called him 'dear' in her life before; that is to say, not since their childish days,—'I am so sorry for you. I used to laugh at it all at first, but I know better *now*. I wish—I wish that one of us had never come to Dacre Court.'

He took the hand which had nestled into his own, in her poor little attempt at comfort, and pressed it to his lips.

‘My darling, in love it is the losers who pay. It would have come some day, and whenever it came it would never have found me better prepared.’





CHAPTER. II.

OVERWHELMED!

THE loves and hates of the various personages who figure in these pages had been suddenly arrested in their robust development by a very serious event—namely, the unexpected illness of Sir Herbert Dacre.

On the same day as that on which Selina discovered Luttrell and Lenore together by the river, this agreeable old gentleman had indulged in the luxury of soundly rating his steward for some trifling neglect in the accounts. These periodical explosions of passion in his in-

interviews with his subordinates were a common feature in his life. No harm had ever been known to result from them either to the irascible baronet's nerves or general health. Those who knew him best, considered that they were a kind of safety valve, and were really necessary to keep him alive. In fact, it was a current superstition that if Sir Herbert should ever go so long as a whole week without getting into a blind rage, it might be taken as a warning that his end was drawing nigh.

This particular 'letting off the steam' with his steward ought then, according to all previous experience, to have acted as a tonic upon his system. But this time the customary medicine had a totally contrary effect. About an hour after the stormy interview had been concluded, a trembling footman entered his master's room with a letter. Judge of his aston-

ishment when he found his dreaded master lying on the sofa insensible.

Medical assistance was procured immediately, and the old gentleman soon recovered. The fit, of whatever character it might have been, speedily passed away, leaving him to outward appearance very little the worse for its visitation.

When Sir Herbert came down, two days after, from his bedroom, he looked a trifle less sardonic, a trifle more subdued—that was all. The steward who had been the innocent cause of the seizure, gave it as his deliberate opinion that the old gentleman would live to ‘blow him sky high’ for many a year yet.

Mrs Partlet took a different view. She had had a long and private interview with the doctor; and from what that gentleman told her, had arrived at the conclusion that her brother’s time in this

world was short. To her daughters alone she communicated this belief, and exhorted them—as was only natural under the circumstances—to play their cards with extra skill.

The young men, being such intimate friends of the family, had stayed on. So, on the day when Sir Herbert resumed his place amongst them all, he found affairs in much the same state as he had left them. The loves and hates, the hopes and disappointments which had suddenly been arrested by his illness, were ready to bloom afresh. For a moment the Black Angel of Death had seemed to hover around Dacre Court. He had come so close that, to use the fine expression of one of England's greatest orators, they had heard 'the beating of his wings.' And with that dark shadow so near, the most thoughtless amongst them had thought of little else. It was

no time for love-making. Neither was it a time for spiteful speeches.

A message had been conveyed to Lenore by Gwendolen that their uncle wished to see her. She went to the library with hesitating steps. With any other man, the task of congratulating him on his recovery would have been an easy one. If she said little, he might think her heartless; if she said much, he might think her false.

He looked changed somehow, she observed. His expression was milder, his eyes burned with a softer light. There was almost a gentleness about him.

'I am very glad to see you so much better, uncle,' she said simply, as she ventured to kiss him for the first time.

'Thank you, my dear,' he answered, in quite a kindly voice. Then after a moment's pause, he added,—'The others

have said that, but I don't suppose they mean it.'

The tone in which he spoke was more sad than sarcastic. Could it be that this old cynic, brought for an instant face to face with Death, had felt the exceeding bitterness of leaving nobody behind who could honestly regret him?

'I hope you don't think I am such a hypocrite?' she asked hastily.

'No,' he replied slowly. 'I believe you are an honest, truthful girl. And why should you want me to die? I have left you nothing. And you haven't known me long enough to hate me? It is natural in the others to look upon me as a burden, but not in *you*.'

She was sorely puzzled and embarrassed by this singular speech. When a man of Sir Herbert's peculiar temperament takes to uttering his thoughts aloud, the position of the person whom he chooses

for his temporary confidant is not one to be envied.

‘Uncle,’ she cried suddenly, ‘I am going to ask you a very bold question, if you will give me leave.’

He nodded his head for answer, with a not unkindly smile. Perhaps he guessed the nature of it.

‘Why have you never thought it worth while to make those around you love you?’

He looked at her fixedly with his keen, black eyes, and there was the old sardonic ring in his voice as he said,—

‘Do you think they came here out of love for me?’

She was silent under this searching counter-question. He smiled grimly as he resumed,—

‘I see you are too candid and too truthful to attempt to fence with me. They came to serve their own ends—to get the old man’s money; and the old man, not

being a fool, sees through their game, and treats them with the contempt they deserve.'

'But if you had made their lives pleasant to them,' argued the girl, 'they would have grown to love you for your own sake, and your money would have been a secondary consideration with them.'

'Bah!' cried the old man; but his tones were a trifle less cynical, it seemed to her. 'What is the use of love in this world? Suppose I had acted as you say; suppose I had allowed these girls to twine themselves round my heart, what would have been my reward? In the evening of my life, when I most wanted love and grateful care, they would have walked off with the first young fellow who had beckoned to them, and left the old man to die alone. Have you ever read "Les Miserables"? Do you remember the picture of Jean Valjean dying in his garret, while the girl whom he has rescued from poverty, to whom he has

devoted his life, for whom he has beggared himself, is billing and cooing with Monsieur Marius? *That* is the way in which the young repay the love of the old.'

'I am afraid you look at the dark side of every picture,' she said timidly, for his determined cynicism almost frightened her. He seemed to search with such malignant zeal for the black spots in the human heart.

'You are young, my dear, *very* young, and it is natural in youth to see more sunshine than shadow. When I was your age I had the same generous impulses. You smile, but it's a fact. Well, this is unprofitable conversation. I sent for you really to 'talk upon business.'

Lenore opened her eyes rather wide at this, but said nothing. Sir Herbert fumbled amongst a pile of old letters, and presently drew forth one which, at the distance, she could see was in her mother's handwriting.

‘I have not spoken to you yet about your family affairs, because pecuniary misfortune is not a very pleasant topic. But as far as I can judge, you seem to have arrived at a pretty pass.’

‘We could not be much worse,’ murmured she, blushing.

‘Yes, you could,’ corrected Sir Herbert, severely; ‘you *could* be very much worse. You could be without a roof to shelter you, without bread to eat, without decent clothes to cover you. There are, to put it mildly, hundreds of people, well born and well brought up, who are in that position at the present moment.’

She was terribly confused at this sudden attack, and could not muster courage to answer a word. She was also intensely astonished at the feeling way in which he had spoken of real poverty. Surely this singular old gentleman was made up of contradictions.

‘ I have here a letter from your mother, in which she gives me a very full account of your condition,’ he resumed, after having administered this wholesome rebuke to his young relative. ‘ I will read you a short extract. “ For upwards of ten years Mr Chester has lived in a style of criminal extravagance, has sanctioned pleasures, amusements, etc., which his income could not afford. For the mere gratification of vanity, for the sake of appearing as well off as his wealthier neighbours, he has burdened my child’s inheritance with a load of debt that can never be lifted.” That is what your mother says,’ observed Sir Herbert, throwing the letter down. ‘ Now I should like to know how much of it is true. The amount of the mortgage she puts at forty thousand pounds—is that true ?’

‘ Quite,’ answered Lenore, in a very low voice.

‘So much for that. Well, then for the next point. Is it true that your father is the sole culprit in the matter?’

‘I think we were all to blame, uncle.’

‘That is rubbish!’ cried Sir Herbert rudely. ‘You and your sisters are mere children—what do you know about money and incomes? But I know something about my half-sister. Is it not a fact that she was the leading spirit where extravagance was concerned?’

This was a delicate question to be put to a child about her own mother. Lenore kept silence.

‘I see by your confusion that my suspicions are correct,’ said her uncle grimly. ‘From what I remember of your father, he was a sort of man who cared for two things particularly—a good glass of wine and an equally good cigar; not a kind of man to go in for show and expenditure on his own account.’

‘He has been very weak, and—I think,’ admitted Lenore hesitatingly, ‘that he did not like to refuse mamma anything, for fear she should accuse him of not doing his duty by us.’

‘Precisely,’ said Sir Herbert, in the same grim tone. ‘His notions of duty are somewhat peculiar. Now, as far only as their two selves are concerned, I don’t think they deserve the least pity. But it is certainly very hard that you children should suffer through having such exceedingly foo—ahem—peculiar parents.’

Here he paused, and Lenore sat tingling all over with excitement. What was this remarkable old gentleman about to propose ?

‘I shall make a new will, and in it I shall put your name,’ he resumed. ‘I shall leave a certain sum of money to you, and you can do what you like with it. If you love yourself better than your family,

you can keep it yourself. If you love your family better than yourself, you can put them on their legs again—as soon as I am off mine.'

For an instant she was fairly overwhelmed by this magnificent promise. Then in the next the tears rushed to her eyes, and she was about to express her gratitude, but he waved her imperiously to silence.

'No thanks ; no thanks,' he said harshly. 'I have taken a fancy to you, a little for your own sake, because I believe you to be more honest and straightforward than the ordinary run of young women. But your chief claim to my liking lies in the fact that you remind me much of one who was dear to me—years ago.'

She could hardly believe it as she listened, but it was a positive fact that the hard old cynic's voice actually faltered as he gave her the explanation. It was

not quite so complimentary a one as she could have wished, perhaps.

‘ I hope, uncle,’ she said presently, in a somewhat timid accent, ‘ that you will not let me dispossess Selina or Gwendolen. Their claims are so much greater than mine.’

He indulged in one of his old chuckles at this request ; and as she heard it, Lenore thought that the temporary softness induced by his illness would soon pass away, and that Sir Herbert would speedily be ‘ himself again ’ in the most unfavourable and awe-inspiring sense of the phrase.

‘ Don’t make yourself uneasy on that point, my dear. I shall make no alteration with regard to them. And I will say this for them, poor creatures, they will have earned their money very hardly,’ he added candidly. ‘ They haven’t always seen the best side of me as you have.’

By an effort, almost superhuman, Lenore

managed to retain her gravity at this pathetic speech.

‘And now, sir, I have something to tell you, although the present moment doesn’t seem a good one to tell it in—just after your kindness to me, I mean,’ she added confusedly. ‘I think I shall return home next week.’

‘I shall be sorry to lose you, my dear. Have you any particular reason for running away so soon?’

‘I don’t get on very well with my aunt and cousins, uncle,’ she explained, hanging her head a little.

Sir Herbert looked wondrous sagacious, and he indulged in a second chuckle.

‘I quite understand ; I quite understand. You are too pretty to be liked by your own sex when young men are about. And both Selina and Gwendolen, though sensible girls generally, are subject to slight delusions on some subjects. I sup-

pose it's a case of "Why don't the men propose?" with the pair of them.'

'I don't know about that, but perhaps it is as well that I should go home soon.'

'Perhaps it is—especially as you have done all the mischief you can do,' said the old man. 'Well, my dear, I've told you what I intend to do, and I shall keep my word. I shall write to-morrow to my lawyer to come down; and it's the last will I shall make.'

So she left him, with a joyful and grateful heart. How could she dream that there would be any alloy in her good fortune when it came?

As she closed the library door softly, she saw Keith Luttrell in the hall. He came to her with a smiling air of inquiry.

'How have you enjoyed your interview? Selina tells me that he is wondrous meek.'

and mild ; that his smile is positively child-like and bland. Is it true ?'

'It is, although I don't think these symptoms will last very long. At present he is quite gentle and kind, and almost free from envy, hatred, and malice.'

'The deuce he is,' observed Mr Luttrell in an awe-struck tone. 'The end of the world must be drawing nigh.'

'Hush ! Don't jest about him. Think what a narrow escape he has had.'

'I am dumb, fair Christian. What do you say to a turn in the grounds ?'

She hesitated a moment, but his pleading look conquered her scruples.

'For just five minutes,' she said, blushing at her own weakness.

'For just five minutes,' repeated her cavalier, with the most serious face in the world. And they passed together out into the grounds.



CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

THE day was an intensely hot one, the autumns of that period being equal to the summers of these degenerate times. Lenore, as she walked slowly by Luttrell's side, and pondered over her too ready acquiescence in his proposal, found in the heat a sufficient cause for suggesting that they should return to the house. Surely such a master-stroke of policy would convince him that she was indifferent to the charms of his society, and at the same time convey to him a lesson of which, if Sir

Timothy Jinks was to be trusted, he sorely stood in need.

He regarded her with eyes full of melancholy reproach. 'You are too cruel, Miss Chester. You are going away so soon, and yet you begrudge me these few minutes—the last, in all probability, we shall spend together. If the heat is too much for you, I'll find a shady nook where we can rest in peace.'

As might have been expected, she offered no further opposition—the effort to recover her lost dignity being nipped in the bud by one appealing look from the man she loved. Why should she deny herself this last pleasure? Even as she indulged in this thought to herself, her heart sank at the prospect of the days so near when there would be no Keith Luttrell to make the time pass on golden wings.

They seated themselves on a rustic

seat beneath a wide-branched venerable oak, whose leafy screen protected them from the rays of the burning sun. There they sat in silence for a long time, there seeming to fall upon them that strange shyness which often intervenes between people who have arrived at a certain stage of love—ere their trembling hopes and fears have put themselves into words, and have only found expression in looks and tones on the part of the man, in blushes and heart-flutterings on the part of the woman.

‘This world would be a charming place, if it were not for the fact that our pleasures were so transient,’ observed Mr Luttrell, at length breaking the drowsy silence, and speaking in a voice of such deep sentiment as to frighten away a timid bird who was watching the pair from a bough close by.

Lenore laughed gaily.

‘That is a most profound and original observation, certainly, Mr Luttrell. Can’t you give us some more aphorisms of the same edifying description?’

‘The most disagreeable verb in the English language,’ he resumed, with unabashed gravity, ‘is the verb “to part.”’

‘Do you think so? On the contrary, I think it has a most exhilarating sound—when you are with disagreeable people,’ she retorted in a sprightly tone.

‘I was thinking of agreeable people,’ he said. ‘More particularly, I was thinking of *you*.’

Flush came the colour on her tell-tale cheek, although she made a poor attempt to laugh him off. ‘Oh, of course, that makes all the difference. I am happy to say I never was a disagreeable person in the sense that people were glad to get rid of me.’

Then again that shy silence came over them. She was looking straight away into space, with burning cheeks, of whose colour she was painfully aware, as well as of the fact that, from his position in the other corner of the seat, he was watching her.

‘Will you think me very impertinent if I ask you a question I have for some time been longing to put to you?’ he said presently. ‘Are you ambitious?’

‘I hardly know. A woman can’t have much ambition.’

‘You can have the ambition of your sex,’ he said, smiling, but there was an eagerness, an anxiety in his voice that belied the carelessness of the smile. ‘At any rate, you have dreamed of a possible future. I would give much to know what shape your dreams have taken.’

‘I don’t know that I have ever thought much about my future,’ she answered evasively. ‘Animal-like, I have been

content to enjoy the present, not being a very imaginative person. But supposing we assume that I have what you call "the ambition of my sex," what form would it take in me, according to *your* experience of female human nature?'

'A brilliant marriage,' said Luttrell promptly.

'Ah!' she said, drawing a long breath, as if the idea were new to her; 'I may say with somebody—Juliet, I think—it is an honour that I dreamed not of. Seriously, Mr Luttrell, do you believe, like nine-tenths of men, that the subject of marriage engrosses nearly the whole of a girl's thoughts?'

As she put this question, she regarded him with an air of offended innocence that was charmingly assumed.

'Ahem! Your question is a large one,' he answered discreetly. 'Let us return to yourself. You have thought of marriage

now and again, I've no doubt. And I suppose you have arrived at the conclusion that, when you do marry, you owe it to yourself to choose somebody who can make your future as bright and pleasant, as luxurious, in a worldly sense, as your past.'

'You are saying a very simple thing in a very roundabout way,' she answered rather petulantly. 'Why do you not say at once that you suppose I have made up my mind to marry a rich man? That is what you mean, I presume; is it not?'

'I expect it is,' admitted Mr Luttrell slowly.

'Well, then, I would sooner marry a rich man than a poor one, of course. But it is necessary that the rich man should be *nice*.'

'Good!' said he approvingly. 'Now to bring you to the test. Suppose, we will say, that on the one side stood Sir Thomas Dunderhead, with a rent-roll of

ten thousand a-year; on the other, say Jack Brown, a poor devil with no rent-roll at all, but an income just touching four figures; and suppose that Brown was what you call *nice*, and Dunderhead wasn't—which would you choose?'

'I'd choose Jack Brown,' she cried merrily; 'that is to say, if he would agree to change his name by royal licence, for I couldn't be called Mrs Brown. Lenore Brown! Fancy what a combination! Poetry and prose.'

You should have seen the light that leapt into his eyes at that merry answer of hers.

'You *could* marry a poor man, then?' he said, and his voice had a ring of triumph in it.

She gave him such a beautiful look—all her soul seemed to be revealed in it.

'I should think I could, if I loved him,' she cried proudly. 'And I would

keep his house neat and tidy, and look after the pence, and do everything that the model wife of a poor man should do.'

At that intimation he went close up to her, and took her little unresisting hand into his.

'Lenore,' he said gravely, 'I am a poor man—a very poor man—to aspire to the love of a girl who could do so much better for herself. Could you marry me?'

Her lips trembled so with inward emotion that they could not frame an answer. But her eyes lifted themselves shyly to his, and that was enough. The next moment his arms were wound round her, her head was pillowed upon his breast, and Keith Luttrell had pressed upon her lips the first kiss she had ever had from a lover.

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'I thought that—that you were fond of Selina,' she said presently.

Dazed as she was by her new-born happiness, she was woman enough to watch him narrowly as she put that searching question. If he *had* trifled, ever so slightly, with the affections of that too sanguine maiden, guilt would declare itself in the drooping of an eyelid, in a false ring of the voice. There would be some token that he stood self-condemned in his own estimation.

But voice and glance seemed to bear testimony to his innocence. 'I am very fond of both the girls, in a brotherly sort of way. We were children together; you can see for yourself that our intimacy was not of yesterday. But there never has been anything beyond a little flirtation, upon my honour as—as your betrothed. If there were no escaping from the ordeal; if I were condemned to marry Selina or lose my head,' he added, with manly magnanimity, 'I would keep my head and make her Mrs Luttrell—that is,

if I had not met you. Of some women I know, I could not even say that ; but it is not going to an extravagant length, is it ?'

So that baseless illusion was dispelled. Time alone would prove whether Gwendolen's assertions with regard to Sir Timothy were also the myth that Lenore believed.

'Am I your first love ?' she asked softly, after a pause.

'My first *true* love,' he answered. And this time there was just the suspicion of a false ring in his voice which smote keenly upon her too tender heart. What wonder if she had harboured a hope that he might give her a heart as pure and unstained by previous wandering fancies as that which she offered to him ? What woman, giving herself heart and soul to her *first* lover, does not feel a rude shock on suspecting that the exchange is not equal ?

'My first *true* love,' he repeated gently.

‘As a boy, I fell violently in love with my tutor’s daughter, a mature damsel of thirty, and I may have gone through one or two more similar experiences. But I have never loved, in the real sense of the term, till *now*.’

What man in his day has not given utterance to such light and well-meant perjuries to his love of the hour? And what woman, drinking in the welcome music of such reassuring words, is not ready to believe them true, and plume herself upon being, if not the first, the *only* true one?

‘All the same,’ she said, with a simplicity that had an element of pathos in it, ‘I would prefer that you had never cared for any woman before.’

‘If I had known that there was such an angel waiting for me, I would never have *looked* at another woman. But how *was* I to know that? All I can promise is that,

from this day forth, every and any other woman will be utterly uninteresting to me. And how about you, my darling? Am I the first, or was there ever another, or even several others?'

'You are the first,' she answered, with a radiant smile that left him no room for doubt.

'How about Farquhar?' he asked jestingly. 'Has that hapless young man only himself to blame for his folly?'

'I am afraid so. Poor old Bob! I'm afraid he will be awfully cut up when he knows about it. I do believe he is terribly fond of me.'

'He will get over it,' said Mr Luttrell, with that easy air with which we speak of the misfortunes of others. 'His nature is shallow. There is no depth in him.'

'He is deeper than you think, perhaps,' she said, a little hurt at this cavalier description of one whose only fault was

that he loved her 'not wisely, but too well.'

They would have sat there for hours, revelling in their new-born happiness, simply content to breathe the same air, but there was such a mundane thing as dinner to be thought of. They did not want any dinner, of course—at least Lenore did not—it is only very young men whose appetites are affected by love,—but it was necessary that they should put in an appearance. And so that delightful afternoon came to a close, all too soon.

There is a something in the demeanour of lovers after the fateful words have been spoken which, unless they are gifted with superhuman cunning, betrays their sweet secret to all who have eyes to see. Both the actors in this little drama flattered themselves that they were acting so consummately as to blind everybody.

Poor simpletons! Before the evening was over each had guessed what had taken place.

Sir Timothy knew it, and thought what a thousand pities it was that such a lovely girl should throw herself away upon a man whose income could just about keep himself.

Robert Farquhar read the new light of love in those radiant eyes, and felt a strange chill in the region of his honest heart—felt that she was lost to him now irretrievably.

Selina knew it, and perhaps wept bitter tears of anger and mortification in her own chamber later on.

Gwendolen knew it, and, burning with righteous wrath against this too fair intruder upon their hearth, marvelled at the faithlessness and blindness of men.

Sir Herbert knew it, chuckling indescribably as he said to himself, that

in ten years' time these young fools would wish they had never seen each other.

It was a long time, you may be sure, before Lenore closed her eyes that night. What an eventful day it had been ! What happiness it had brought her, reminding her of the old proverb that ' it never rains but it pours '—happiness to those she loved so dearly, as well as happiness to herself. . Oh ! if some little bird, such as we read of in fairy tales, would fly to Deepdale to -night with the wonderful news that grim Sir Herbert had turned generous in his old age, and was intending, in a roundabout way, to restore his inheritance to the impertinent Sydney who had so rudely affronted him. She would write the first thing to-morrow.

No ! on second thoughts she would not ; they should wait for the joyful news until she returned. If she wrote, they would have got used to it by the time she reached

home, and she would not see and realise their pleasure, as she would do when she told them with her own lips. Neither could she *write* a word about that other strange event which this wondrous and happy day had brought forth. For she knew her people well enough to foresee that obstacles would be put in the way of her marriage to Keith Luttrell—none but what patience and true love could smooth away, perhaps ; but still obstacles. Her mother, never given to compliment, had always looked upon her as the flower of the flock ; and even the careless, insouciant father had often said, in all seriousness, that he would never allow her to throw herself away. It was not in the least likely that they would look upon her handsome lover with her eyes. They would only see in him a more than ordinarily good-looking young man, who had no business to think of asking a well-brought up girl to share his lot.

And, busily thinking of all these things, she glided at last into dreamland. And in that blissful land of slumber, she went again through the scenes of the day. Again, in her happy dreams, she heard her lover's fervent vows, she felt his kiss upon her maiden lips. And so real was that dream, that she was fain to chide the rosy light which woke her to another day.

And yet how beautiful the world all looked as she sprang from her bed and peeped through the window. The light of her own great happiness transfigured all she looked upon, until hill and plain, stretching out before her gaze, seemed bathed in a golden glory. Only a few short hours ago since he had told her of his love, and the words were ringing in her ears now as if he were by her side. The far-off sea sang them softly to her—the birds sang them more loudly—the rustling leaves whispered them with gentle iteration.

Those sweet, true words of love! The sea and the birds and the rustling leaves set them to a subtle music of their own, and sang them over and over again, until her heart beat fast, and the tears of joy stood in her radiant, love-lit eyes.





CHAPTER IV.

WORLDLY ADVICE.

SHE looked at her watch, and found that it wanted more than an hour to her usual time of rising. But, with her thoughts in such a sweet tumult, she could not endure the thought of going to bed again; so she dressed herself quickly and went out into the grounds. She half expected to find Luttrell there before her; surely his happiness must have caused him to open his eyes earlier than usual like herself. But whether Mr Luttrell was of a less emotional nature, or whether he had gone

through this sort of thing before in his life, one thing is certain, that at the time when Lenore was bubbling over with her new-born joy, that gentleman was sleeping the calm sleep of the just.

She had not, however, gone many yards before she came upon a substitute for her unconscious lover, in the person of Robert Farquhar.

‘Why, Bob,’ she cried, blushing guiltily, ‘who would have thought of seeing you?’

‘I may ask the same question,’ replied Robert, with a melancholy smile. ‘I suppose I may contemplate the beauties of the early morning as well as my betters. Let us contemplate them together.’

Lenore had not bargained for this companionship. She had wanted to utter her sweet thoughts aloud to the little birds, or perhaps take a discreet old oak into her confidence, like Mr Tennyson’s lover. But she was too good-natured to let him see

that she did not want him. So they walked on together slowly.

‘You will let me congratulate you?’ said her cavalier, presently.

She hung her head shyly.

‘What for, Robert?’

‘On your engagement to Mr Luttrell,’ he replied simply.

‘How in the world did you know of it?’

‘Do you think a man can’t read the face of the woman he loves? There was a new light on it when you sat at dinner last night,’ he answered, with an odd break in his voice. ‘I knew it was coming; and now that it has come, and it is time for me to say good-bye for ever to my own foolish hopes, let me wish you happiness from the bottom of my heart.’ He took her hand, and pressed it tenderly. ‘God bless you, dear! May he make your life as bright as I would have made it, had you given me the chance.’

She dashed the tears from her eyes.

‘The only alloy in my happiness is the thought that it gives you pain,’ she said falteringly.

‘You were always a sympathetic little soul,’ he said gratefully. ‘Don’t bother about me. As I told you the other day, in love it goes hard with the losers. I shall get over it some day, I daresay,’ looking away at the landscape with a somewhat misty gaze.

‘Robert,’ she said presently, in a rather timid voice, ‘I can’t endure the idea of your wasting any regrets upon me. I am sure that if you began to think of somebody else, you would get cured in—in no time. I have been thinking over the matter, and I have hit upon a capital plan.’

‘Yes,’ answered Bob listlessly, as she paused.

‘Don’t you think Selina is a very nice girl, Bob?’

‘I don’t think I have ever thought about her,’ returned the unappreciative Robert. ‘But I daresay she is a fairly nice girl.’

‘Now, suppose you were to fall in love with her,’ pursued Lenore coaxingly. ‘I am sure she has very amiable qualities, and uncle will leave her a heap of money when he dies.’

‘If anything were to cause a rupture between you and Luttrell, do you think you could transfer your affections to me in the space of a week?’ he asked sadly.

‘I—I don’t fancy so,’ she answered confusedly. ‘But men are so different from women, you know, Robert.’

‘Are they? Perhaps I am not quite like the majority of men, then. Lenore, Lenore, you don’t know how I have loved you, how I do love you at this moment, or you would not talk so calmly of my caring for another woman. I don’t want to

distress you, dear—to cast even a shadow upon your happiness, but I must tell you that no other will ever replace you in my heart. I shall get used to it in time, and when I do, I will still be your friend, if you will let me. But you won't expect me to come to your wedding, will you?' he asked, with a piteous look. 'I could not see you walk out of church the wife of another man. You don't know what a fool I've been—how I've cheated myself with hope, how often I've told myself that some day you would say Yes, how often I've pictured ourselves coming out of the old church at Seaford as man and wife.'

The poor fellow broke down here, with something like a sob in his throat. Then, quickly recovering his self-control, he seized her hands again, and wrung them fervently.

'I'm a cur to go on like this, just when

you are so happy ; as if I had anybody to blame for my folly but myself ! Go on by yourself, dear. I'll have my gloomy fit alone,' and so saying, he turned abruptly away, and walked swiftly in an opposite direction.

Lenore's eyes filled with tears as she looked after him—the bright, cheerful Bob Farquhar, whose life was spoiled by his love for her. Joy had driven her from her bed ; sorrow had driven him from his. What a world of cross purposes it was. Would she have ever grown to love him as he had hoped if Luttrell had not stepped in the way, she wondered. Perhaps. One thing was very certain : she had never felt more warmly towards him than on this particular morning succeeding her betrothal to another.

After breakfast, when the young men had gone out shooting, Sir Herbert requested his niece to accompany him to the library.

‘I wish to have a little serious conversation with you, my dear,’ he said, when they were seated. ‘My age gives me privileges, you know, and you must pardon me for saying that, in my opinion, you have been making a great goose of yourself.’

So he knew her secret too. She blushed all over, and hung her head shyly.

‘How did you know, uncle?’

‘I have a “familiar,”’ answered Sir Herbert, fixing on her such a look as that with which the Ancient Mariner must have transfixed the wedding guest, and speaking in a sepulchral tone. ‘At the ghostly hour of midnight this black little sprite comes to my bedside and whispers, “What ho! master!” to which I make answer, “Speak, slave!” He then proceeds to tell me anything that has happened in the day which it is for my benefit to know. For example, he tells me that

at such an hour my niece Gwendolen apostrophised me as an old curmudgeon; that at such another hour my niece Selina was wondering when it would please a certain personage, whose name I will not shock your innocent ears by mentioning, will claim me for his own. This same useful "familiar" came to me last night, and informed me that you and Luttrell were what is called, in the sweet parlance of lovers, "engaged."

'I understand,' she said, laughing so heartily at her uncle's whimsical description that he began to chuckle too.

'You're an excellent little minx,' he said quite kindly. 'If I had uttered this rubbish to your cousins, they would have believed I was going mad, and sent for old Stubbs the doctor, with a view to getting me safely incarcerated before I became dangerous. I really believe, if you were to take up your residence with

me, my life might be considerably prolonged—you have such a keen sense of humour.'

'I fear you rate me too highly,' she said, in an alarmed tone. Heaven forbid that Sir Herbert should make such an awful proposition save in jest. He read her thoughts, and smiled grimly.

'Don't be frightened, my dear; I have no intention of putting your affection to so cruel a test. But speaking seriously, your cousins' absence of humour has exercised a most depressing effect upon my spirits. I have tried to cultivate them. I went through a course of Charles Lamb with them. I read them the chapter on "Roast Pig,"—not a smile disturbed the placid serenity of their features. I retailed for their benefit that exquisite answer of his to the man who asked his opinion as to what sort of a crop of turnips there would be—that it depended on the boiled

legs of mutton. They stared at me with owl-like stolidity. What can one do with such creatures?' he concluded, in an injured tone. 'How can a man's more genial qualities expand in the society of such unappreciative souls?'

'A sense of humour is born, not made, uncle.'

'Perhaps so. Well, to return to your affairs. You are doing a very foolish thing in marrying merely for love.'

'Ought I to marry without love, then?' she asked.

'I said, *merely* for love; that is to say, love without any counterbalancing advantages. In a man's case it is foolish to do so, but he has this advantage, that when the illusion is vanished, he can fall back upon other resources—

"The sword, gown, mart," etc.

In a woman's case it is simply suicide.

When her husband tires of her, what consolation can she find, except one that brings ruin and disgrace in its train; except to quote again from the same poet—

“To love again, and be again undone”?’

‘Why *should* her husband tire of her?’

The old cynic shrugged his shoulders.

‘It’s a way that husbands have got, that is all. Now, you have fallen in love with Mr Luttrell. Let us see what are his qualifications.’ He began checking them off on his fingers. ‘Item, a curly brown noddle, with nothing particular inside it. Item, a pair of expressive eyes, capable of looking unutterable things at silly little girls like yourself. Item, a well-hung tongue, practised in uttering tender things to the same silly little girl at whom he looks them. Item, a pair of broad shoulders, matched with a pair of straight legs.

Such is Mr Luttrell, as he appears to the enamoured eyes of Miss Lenore Chester. But what about his character, his qualities? You know nothing of them. You take them on trust, and think they must correspond with the perfection of his curly head and his straight legs.'

He paused, perhaps for want of breath. Lenore made no comment, so he resumed.

'In the first place, it's a great mistake to marry a handsome man, unless you're *not* in love with him, in which case the admiration evinced for him by other women will not particularly affect you. What guarantee have you got that Mr Luttrell has not said to half-a-dozen other women the same sweet things that have so charmed your silly little ears? What guarantee have you got that he will not repeat them to half-a-dozen other women in the future? And in the second

place, it is doubly a mistake to marry a handsome man who is poor.'

'Why, uncle?' cried poor Lenore, clasping her hands together with a piteous little gesture.

'Because, my dear, it is not in human nature that a man of Luttrell's stamp will be content to find his happiness for ever and a day in the attractions of the humble little *ménage* which his modest income will alone allow you. He will go out and enjoy himself: to enjoy himself socially, a man only requires a dress-suit and money enough for a cab-fare. You will stop at home and look after the babies, because you won't care to let other women see that you can't afford to dress as well as they. At the end of five years of matrimony Mr Luttrell will be very little the worse, while your lot will be that of the neglected wife. Your husband can go to all the parties he is asked

to, and flirt with all the pretty girls who admire his curly head and his *beaux yeux*. Mrs Luttrell will have to stop away, because the butcher and the baker and the landlord will have swallowed up all the available cash, and left nothing for the dressmaker.'

Lenore began to weep silently. This merciless old gentleman was taking the bloom off her romance with a vengeance. He flattered himself that he was converting her to sound views of life, and went on with still greater unction.

'You are a remarkably pretty girl, and, looking at you from a merely commercial point of view, you ought to fetch a high price in the marriage market. At the same time, I don't wish you to take merely a mercenary view of the future. I don't say, unite yourself to any ill-conditioned rascal solely on account of his money. Take a middle course. Pick

out a decent young fellow, who will make a good husband, as well as give you a moderate amount of luxuries. At any rate, build upon some surer foundation than a mere romantic attachment conceived in the space of a week or two. I have a young fellow in my mind's eye at the present moment.'

'I couldn't marry anybody but Keith,' sobbed Lenore.

'Fiddledee!' cried Sir Herbert rudely. 'Don't talk such nonsense to a man of my age and experience. If I were to prove to you that he was an unmitigated villain, you wouldn't have him, would you?'

'You can't prove it,' she cried defiantly.

He smiled grimly.

'My dear, I'm not going to try. I have talked to you like a father—very much more sensibly than your own father could have talked, I'll wager. Go and ponder over all

I have said ; remember that you are binding yourself for life to a man who can give you nothing except that most unsubstantial of all earthly gifts, love. Tell yourself that it is possible his love may change, may wane, and ask yourself where you will be when you lose that. Think over it all, my dear,'—he crossed over to her, and laid his hand upon her head in a most paternal manner,—‘and put it to yourself whether you are not running a tremendous risk in staking all your future upon that one throw.’

The old gentleman had wounded her very sorely, but he had no doubt meant well. She thanked him through her tears for his kind intentions, and rose to depart.

‘I told you that I had a young man in my mind’s eye,’ he said, when she had got to the door. ‘It is young Farquhar. I am not given to over-estimate my fellow-creatures, as you know, but I believe him

to be one of the very few men I have come across who are honest, loyal, and true in all their relations either with men or women. Take my advice, my child ; send curly-head to the right about ; get your other young friend to dye his hair to a nice shade of brown, and convert yourself into Mrs Robert Farquhar without delay.'

She went to her room to remove the traces of her tears, and having done so, proceeded to the morning-room to join her aunt and cousins. But these agreeable relatives regarded her so stonily, and gave her such short answers, that she speedily discovered in their treatment a pretty plain intimation that they wished to wash their hands of her. So, after a few ineffectual attempts to conciliate them, she returned to her chamber to meditate upon all that had taken place between herself and Sir Herbert. Need I say

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that her sanguine heart laughed to scorn the gloomy prophecies of that venerable cynic? Her noble-souled Keith grow tired of her, leave her to weep by herself while he went out to flirt with other women! Perish the thought!





CHAPTER V.

LENORE'S DEPARTURE.

COLD looks and a disdainful bearing were not the only punishment meted out to Lenore by her cousins for the offence of being too greatly admired. On the day of her departure, Gwendolen tapped at her bedroom door, and on receiving permission to enter, advanced towards her with the air of a person who had made up her mind for a thorough explanation.

‘I trust I am not disturbing you?’ she began, in an icy tone.

To such a question, common politeness

enacted that Lenore should return but one answer. In her heart of hearts she was extremely sorry for the girls, and was quite Christian enough to forgive their discourteous treatment of herself. After all, with Keith Luttrell for a lover, she could afford to forgive a great deal, she thought.

Then Gwendolen began an oration which had evidently been carefully prepared beforehand ; for no woman, labouring under a deep sense of personal injury, could have adjusted her sentences so nicely on the spur of the moment.

‘I have many faults, I know, but I am happy to say that insincerity is not amongst them. You cannot have failed to observe that my bearing towards you of late has been the reverse of cordial.’

‘I think that goes without saying,’ assented Lenore mildly. ‘You and your sister have certainly done your best to show me that I was not wanted here.’

For an instant the ruddy hue of shame showed itself upon Gwendolen's cheek.

'Pray do not think that our dislike of you is actuated by sordid motives,' she said hastily. 'I told you on the first day we met that we would not begrudge you your fair share of Uncle Herbert's money, and I adhere to what I said. You had a perfect right to try for that stake. But after the confidence I reposed in you, it was cruel—it was mean of you to take Selina's lover away from her.'

At the accusation of meanness the hot blood rushed to the girl's brow, and a stinging retort leapt to her lips. But native generosity, and pity for the vanquished in love's unequal conflict, kept it back.

'I am of opinion it was a case of utter self-deception on Selina's part,' she said slowly. 'Mr Luttrell could never have cared for her in the way she imagined,

or he would not have taken all these years to weigh the matter.'

Gwendolen looked slightly nonplussed at this decisive answer. She felt, perhaps, that she could not argue the question, for the very sufficient reason that she had no proof. She could only take refuge in a kind of general scolding.

'I have been dreadfully deceived in you,' she resumed presently, and now there was a suspicion of tears in her voice. 'You seemed such a nice, frank sort of girl, and I asked Robert Farquhar here on purpose, because I thought it would please you. And now you have been and upset everything. Sir Timothy and I used to be the best of friends—'

'I never gave Sir Timothy the least encouragement,' interrupted Lenore hotly. 'If he chose to make a fool of himself, that is not my fault. If he had possessed a grain of common-sense, he must have

seen that he wasn't in the least my style. And in Heaven's name, Gwendolen, if he cared for you as your sister alleged he did, why did he not say so long ago? It must be a poor kind of love that can't declare itself.'

'There were reasons,' replied Gwendolen, in a voice of great mystery—'reasons which I am not at liberty to state, which fully account for his—ahem!—reticence.'

Lenore shrugged her shoulders. Could self-delusion have ever gone further than in the case of these two young women? she thought. For it was utterly impossible for her to bring herself to believe that Sir Timothy and Keith Luttrell had proved themselves the recreant knights her cousin implied.

'I don't pretend to understand riddles, Gwendolen,' she said at length, in a somewhat impatient tone. 'If Selina

really cared for Keith in the way you suggested, I am very sorry for her. All the same, I think it would have been better for her to keep her secret to herself until she was quite sure of the gentleman. As for yourself, I really don't know what to say. I never invited Sir Timothy's admiration, and I can only regret he did not bestow it in a quarter where it was likely to be appreciated.'

'I did not come here to bandy words,' said Gwendolen, moving towards the door with great majesty. 'But I felt it a duty I owed both myself and my sister not to let you leave the house without letting you know our opinion of your conduct. I am thankful to say that few such instances have come before my notice. You were kind enough just now to offer us your pity. I think it is you who rather deserve pity.'

'Why so?' inquired Lenore curiously.

if Robert Farquhar could console Miss Partlet for her ill-placed fancy. Unfortunately for the success of such a scheme, her own sentiments on the subject did not lead her to believe that Mr Farquhar could be accepted as a substitute for Keith Luttrell in the affections of any young woman who had ever been in love with the latter.

As they returned to the house—their ramble had extended over two hours, yet they both felt that the time had flown on wings—Lenore acquainted her lover with her uncle's generous disposition towards her family, taking care to explain to him that, however the money might be left, it would be applied to clear the Chester estates.

'Of course he may state in his will the purpose for which the money is intended. But if he does not, leaving it to me without any directions, I shall not

look on it as my own, but hand it over immediately to papa.'

It is not every man who could hear his betrothed talk so coolly of handing over forty thousand pounds to her relatives, without suggesting that she might retain a little for her own use, and the use of her future husband. Apparently Mr Luttrell was not of a grasping or mercenary nature, to judge by the cheerful readiness with which he acquiesced in her generous intentions.

'You are quite right,' he said heartily. 'Even if there should be no conditions attached to the bequest, there was a tacit understanding between yourself and your uncle as to the way in which it was to be applied. So you could not in honour keep any portion of it, unless especially requested by him to do so.'

She looked up in his face, with a glow of satisfaction overspreading her

own. When she told them at home of her engagement, would not his ready approval of her self-denial be something to record in his favour, and a conclusive proof that there was no element of sordidness in his character?

‘You must certainly have bewitched the old gentleman,’ he said presently. ‘Forty thousand pounds is not a trifle, and I should have thought Sir Herbert was the last man in the world to help pay the debts of anybody else.’

‘I don’t think I owe it solely to my own influence. From what he hinted, it seems I was fortunate enough to remind him of somebody he had loved in his youth.’

‘He must have been chaffing you, Lenore. I can draw upon my imagination as largely as any man, but I *cannot* fancy that wizened little old cynic in love with anybody but himself. I believe Barham must have had him in his mind’s

eye when he wrote those lines about the Devil and St Médard. And Mr Luttrell fell to quoting with great relish,—

‘He looked at the saint, and he looked at the sack,
The greedy old glutton, and thought within,—
“Dear heart alive,
If I could but contrive
To pop that elderly gentleman in.”’

‘Hush!’ said Lenore gently, although she could not help laughing. ‘He has been so kind to me that I don’t like to hear anything said against him. A severe disappointment quite warps some natures.’

They had been talking so loudly that they had not heard a step upon the gravel close behind them. The guilty blood leapt up into both their faces as Sir Herbert’s piping tones called out to them to stop. They turned round and saw him hobbling along with his stick, having come up behind them from a side-path.

Had he heard Luttrell's exceedingly complimentary remarks? If he had, surely his countenance could not have worn so serene an expression. Neither was it in human nature that his tones could have been so genial. He walked with them as far as the steps of the terrace, when he dismissed them in a most paternal manner. When he was quite out of sight, they turned to each other with the simultaneous question,—

‘Could he have heard?’

‘I fancy not,’ said Lenore, after a few moments of anxious reflection; ‘or if he did, he wasn’t aware that your flattering remarks applied to himself. If he *did* hear, all I can say is he’s the most accomplished actor that ever lived. Garrick couldn’t have held a candle to him.’

‘By Jove! I was never so floored in my life,’ protested Luttrell, the ruddy hue of shame again overspreading his cheek

at the recollection of his discourteous behaviour. 'I should have felt grateful to the earth to open and swallow me up. There are few hosts who haven't had disagreeable things said of them by their guests at some time or another. But to be pounced upon by the very man you are abusing, and that man the one whose hospitality you are enjoying even while you are abusing him—it's enough to make a fellow feel himself a cad for the remainder of his life. I think I'd give half my income for the next ten years to be sure that he hadn't heard me.'

'Let it be a lesson to you for the future never to speak ill of anybody.'

'I won't promise to go quite so far as that; but I will take good care never to talk against a man until I am at least ten miles distant from his house.'

'And even then,' added Lenore, laugh-

ing, 'you can never be certain that some little bird of the air will not repeat your words to him. But seriously, I do hope he did *not* hear. You called him a "wizened little old cynic." Those words seemed burned upon my brain in letters of fire. He wouldn't object to being called a cynic; he would look upon that as a compliment. But the adjectives are so awful. Think of the combination, wizened, little, and old. The meekest Christian that ever lived could never forgive you.'

'Don't repeat them, for Heaven's sake!' groaned Luttrell. 'If you only knew the agonies of remorse I'm suffering, you would pity me.'

The next day witnessed Lenore's departure from Dacre Court. Sir Herbert bade her a most affectionate farewell, even carrying his complaisance so far as to kiss her—a courtesy which he had not practised

towards any member of his family for years. With his keen eyes upon them, Mrs Partlet and the girls had to infuse a show of civility into their adieux, but of course Lenore knew that she left unforgiven by these two forsaken damsels. Sir Timothy's fat face wore an expression of melancholy as he shook hands with her, but she was in hopes that with her departure he would return to his allegiance, if he had ever sworn any. Farquhar had already gone; Luttrell was the only member of the party left to whom she had now to say good-bye. As they had already said it in their own fashion privately an hour before, the second ceremony did not occupy long.

Her journey home was lightened by pleasant thoughts. What a wondrous change this visit, on which she set out with no pleasant anticipations, had wrought in her life. She returned the

bearer of news which would effect a revolution in the future of her family. And as for her own future, what rosy visions of happiness had not those few weeks opened up to her ?





CHAPTER VI.

GERTRUDE IS CONVINCED.

LENORE'S popularity in her family circle was unbounded, and her welcome home again was in consequence a right royal one. Mr Chester regarded her with peculiar affection, because she was the one daughter who evinced a special appreciation of his jokes. Mrs Chester so far forgot her woes as to smile pleasantly. Gertrude hugged her, and Katie wept over her just a little. Sydney took advantage of the general jubilation to prefer a request that on this especial evening he

should be allowed to retire to bed two hours later than usual—a request which was at once granted.

Nobody who has the most elementary knowledge of human nature could imagine that Lenore would be able to keep her good news to herself for long. She had not been home a quarter-of-an-hour before she communicated to her assembled family the history of her momentous interview with Sir Herbert.

To say that they were overwhelmed by such magnificent intentions on the part of a relative from whom they had expected nothing, would be to convey a feeble idea of the feelings with which they listened to the girl's recital. They were so utterly prostrated by the intelligence, that for several minutes they could do nothing but indulge in articulate gasps of wonderment.

Gertrude was the first to break silence,

and her remarks on this occasion, like most that proceeded from this precocious young person, were characterised by much practical wisdom.

‘I don’t believe there ever was such luck since the world began,’ said she. ‘The chief thing we have got to guard against is that too much brooding over it doesn’t turn the small amount of brain our misfortunes have left us. Lenore, my sweet child,’ she added, rising and going over to her sister, ‘let me give you a respectful and admiring embrace. You are the saviour of the family. Generations of Chesters yet unborn shall live to bless your name.’

And having thus delivered herself, it was felt by the rest that she had, with her usual felicity and *aplomb*, expressed the sentiments of a grateful family. Even Mrs Chester—who, ever since the fatal day on which her husband confided to

her his embarrassed position, had gone about with the weary step and woe-begone countenance of a social martyr—became quite bright and joyous for a week or two. Her first thought was, what a thousand pities it seemed that she had not known of Sir Herbert's testamentary intentions in time to put her veto upon Katie's engagement to Joseph Chumleigh. This thought she had the good sense and discretion to keep to herself. Her second thought had reference to the future, and was one which soon found expression.

The third morning after Lenore's arrival, she entered her husband's study, with such a gracious expression of countenance that that astute gentleman at once guessed she had come upon a begging errand.

'I have been thinking deeply over our position,' she said, in her most affable

tone. 'My brother's generosity makes the future clear. We ought now to look to the present, and see what we can do to further the prospects of the dear girls. Katie'—with a deep sigh—'is, unhappily, irrevocably pledged. But we have Lenore and Gerty to think of, and we are bound to do our best for them.'

Mr Chester listened with an air of polite attention, but answered nothing. He knew to what this discourse was tending, and he had no desire to help her to the goal. Her temper began to rise at his cold reception of her preface.

'You must understand what I mean well enough,' she said more sharply. 'If you want the girls to get married, a season or even a couple of seasons in town will be indispensable. They will never get husbands if they continue to be mewed up here.'

'How am I to pay for a season in

town ?' inquired Mr Chester, with a dangerous blandness.

She had the grace to stammer a little in her reply.

'As you have mortgaged so deeply, another couple of thousands will not add greatly to your embarrassments ; and in this instance the end sought will be worth the means.'

He spoke with a temperate firmness, which showed as plainly as his words that her request was hopeless.

'I believe that your brother will keep his promise, but it is upon the cards that at the last moment he may alter his mind. At any rate, I will not consent to raise another shilling upon that security. And two good-looking girls like Gerty and Lenore won't go begging for husbands.'

'Each will be able to find another Joseph Chumleigh, I daresay,' sneered his wife angrily. 'If that is the sort of

husband you desire for your daughters, I am thankful to say that I have higher notions for them.'

And finding that even these acrid remarks failed to provoke him to battle, she presently sailed out of the room with an air of offended majesty.

This, of course, subsequently reached the ears of the girls, but they supported their father so stoutly in his determination to incur no unnecessary expenditure, that Mrs Chester found herself in a minority of one.

It then occurred to Lenore that, as her mother's proposition had originated in a desire to find her a husband, it would be a favourable opportunity to inform her family of the fact that she had already settled this important matter for herself.

But this second piece of news did not meet with anything like the same favour-

able reception that was accorded to the first. Her parents did not absolutely forbid her engagement to Keith Luttrell, because they felt that, as the saviour of the family, she had acquired a right to liberty of action which must have been denied to a daughter who had rendered a less signal service. But Mr Chester shook his head sagely, while Mrs Chester wept copiously at the prospect of so undesirable a match. Katie, who, since her engagement to Joseph Chumleigh, had acquired airs of preternatural wisdom and sagacity, prognosticated misery in the future. Gertrude, with her usual bluntness, told her sister that she was committing suicide—an opinion which a subsequent confidential interview with Lenore induced her to reconsider.

‘I am excessively surprised at a girl of your acuteness making such an egregious mistake as to suppose that, because Mr

Luttrell is not rich, he must necessarily be a nobody.'

Such was the diplomatic manner in which Keith's *fiancée* set out in her task to convert Gertrude from an enemy into a friend.

'Humph!' said that sceptical young person, flattered by the compliment to her sagacity, but still holding for the present to the soundness of her views. 'Somebody has observed that knowledge is power—a very absurd remark, because most clever people that I have ever heard of have resided mostly in garrets. But I am firmly convinced that wealth is power.'

'It may surprise you, then, to hear that Keith Luttrell is a somebody in society—a much more important personage, for example, than Sir Timothy Jinks, who has ten times his income,' pursued Lenore, with a firmness that made her sister begin to waver.

‘I wish I could see my way to believe it, for your sake,’ said Gerty, in a less assured tone.

‘You mustn’t be led away by the vulgar notion that the greatest man in society is he who has the most money,’ continued the elder girl, speaking with great emphasis. ‘That is an excessively provincial view. In the larger world of the capital,’ she added grandly, ‘men are valued for their qualities, their personal character, their capacity for leadership. You remember that Beau Brummell, who was the son of a small tradesman, was the leader of fashion in his day, and taught England how to tie its neckcloths.’

‘I know,’ said Gertrude grimly. ‘And the same gentleman ended by tying his own before a cracked looking-glass in a wretched lodging at Calais.’

‘That was due to causes into which it is not necessary to enter,’ interrupted

Lenore swiftly. 'What I wish to convince you of is the fact that Keith Luttrell is a somebody amongst his fellows. Now, the person from whom I have had his history is a man by no means well disposed towards him—a man, in fact, who rather admired me, and was jealous of him in consequence.'

'In short—Sir Timothy Jinks,' guessed the sagacious Gerty.

'You are quite right. It was Sir Timothy who told me how greatly he had always been thought of by everybody with whom he had come into contact.'

'Did it ever occur to you that Sir Timothy must have been a great fool to crack up his rival to a girl he was in love with himself?' queried Gertrude.

Lenore did not take the trouble to answer this question—what did the fat-faced baronet's wisdom, or want of wisdom, matter to her? She was bent upon

proving to the sceptical Gertrude that Mr Luttrell was an unexceptionable personage in every respect.

She went to work with the cunning suggested by love. Love's too flattering hand limned the portrait of such a being as surely this world had never seen before, and would never see again. Keith Luttrell's position in society and the world of fashion, according to this partial historian; was unique. Dukes had been proud to stroll with him down Piccadilly. Duchesses had almost come to blows to get him to their rival parties. The 'gilded youth' of the day had copied his hats, his coats—everything, in short, that was his. His acquaintance amongst the aristocracy was so extensive and peculiar, that he would be able to find a marquis for Gerty tomorrow, if she so wished it. Any unmarried marquis, in fact, would only be too happy to oblige him in such a matter

—simply for the honour of being connected with him.

Gerty could not hold out against this brilliant description of her future brother-in-law's status.

‘Dear me!’ she said simply, ‘I should certainly have thought Sir Timothy a much greater personage.’

‘Sir Timothy, indeed!’ echoed Lenore, with a superb curl of her lip. ‘If it were not that Keith is so very good-natured, and cannot endure to hurt anybody’s feelings, I very much doubt if he would know Sir Timothy, *in London*.’

‘Dear me!’ again repeated Gertrude falteringly. She felt that there were profound mysteries in the social world which she had been far from fathoming. ‘And yet he would be quite friendly with him in the country.’

Lenore smiled a superior smile.

‘Have you never heard that answer

given by somebody—I don't know whether it was Brummell—to a man who reminded him that he had made his acquaintance at Bath,—“ Yes, sir, and I shall be very glad to know you again, *at Bath* ” ? ’

Gerty gave in after this. The want of money was a stickler, and she had her misgivings as to how anybody could be *quite* such a brilliant creature without a little more of the ‘ needful ’ than Mr Luttrell seemed to possess. But she could not fail to admit that, as the wife of a gentleman who was on the most intimate terms of friendship with no end of the aristocracy, Lenore would be a personage of considerable importance. When she beheld this noted character in the flesh, and listened intently to his conversations and allusions, she was not long in discovering that she had been rather taken in—that she had suffered her usual acuteness to be lulled to sleep by the charms of Lenore's oratory.

But for the present her opposition was changed into toleration.

For my own part, I have no hesitation in saying that Mr Luttrell, although far from being a nobody amongst his compeers, was not exactly the Admirable Crichton which his betrothed, in her zeal and loving worship, had cheated herself and her sister into creating him. He was popular, and a welcome guest at some very good houses, but the world of fashion would not have remained for long inconsolable if this bright, particular star had dropped suddenly from its firmament.





CHAPTER VII.

AN OBSTINATE LOVER.

LENORE'S stoutest ally in this battle that she fought for herself and lover, was Joseph Chumleigh. He heartily approved of the engagement, and although his opinions on this or any other subject had not the slightest influence with Mrs Chester, he possessed the ear of every other member of the family to a remarkable degree. He used this fortunate privilege so greatly to Lenore's advantage, that she ever felt grateful to him for his signal aid. As Mr Chumleigh had never seen or heard of

Keith Luttrell, his conduct could not be explained on the ground of friendly prepossession. I am inclined to think he gave his support for the very sufficient reason that his future mother-in-law was opposing Luttrell with the same occult persistence as she had previously exercised in his own case. For has it not been very wisely said that 'a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind'? His sense of justice also told him that the girl was entitled to some reward for the good fortune she had brought her family.

So, after a few days of wrangling and jangling, of argument and counter-argument, of copious floods of tears on the part of Mrs Chester and Lenore—who wept from opposite causes, of course—Mr Luttrell was allowed to put in his appearance at Deepdale as an accepted suitor. Mrs Chester had, however, exacted a promise from her husband that he would do

his best to put the matter in a proper light before Luttrell, in order to induce him to withdraw.

‘Lenore is a romantic fool ; it is of no use attempting to reason with her,’ she had told him angrily. ‘But he is old enough to be a man of the world, and there is more than a possibility that he thinks he will be able to persuade her to keep the money herself.’

But Mr Chester could not bring himself to believe this.

‘I think it’s genuine,’ he said. ‘The man is simply head over ears in love, I suppose, and can’t look into the future at all.’

However, he so far obeyed his wife’s request as to summon Luttrell to a private and confidential interview on the second day of that gentleman’s arrival. And, to do him justice, he opened the conversation with a straightforwardness and absence of embarrassment that one would not have

expected in a man of his indolent temperament.

‘I want to have a talk with you, Luttrell ; and if what I shall say won’t be over-pleasant, you must make up your mind to take it in good part. I’ve told Lenore till I’m tired that she is making a great mistake, and I want to tell you the same as politely as I can.’

Mr Luttrell smiled pleasantly, as an intimation of the cheerful spirit in which he intended to bear his part of the interview—following the recommendation of his future father-in-law, to take it all in good part.

‘You know all about the Dacre business—of the money he is going to leave us through Lenore, of course?’

Luttrell nodded in acquiescence.

‘And it is just because of that business that I don’t openly put a veto upon the whole thing. If the money were going to be left to her, I should exercise my

rights as a parent and forbid the engagement. But as she has got it for us through her influence with her uncle, Mrs Chester and I don't feel that we should be acting fairly if—if—'

As Mr Chester seemed at a loss how to finish the sentence, Luttrell finished it for him.

'If you were to accept her money and deprive her of her lover too.'

The other looked a little uncomfortable at this blunt definition.

'I don't think your way of putting it is quite happy, but let that pass. What I want to point out to you is this, that poor people have no business to marry poor people. She, with her good looks, ought to marry—I won't say a wealthy man, but a man who can keep her in good style. And if you will pardon me for advising you, you ought to look out for a woman with money.'

'Your advice is excellent,' said Luttrell,

with quiet good-humour. 'But when did anybody ever take excellent advice? We have counted the cost, and are prepared to stand it.'

'No, you haven't counted the cost, either of you,' cried Mr Chester, a little testily. 'You are too much in love to look into the future. Have you ever reckoned up how far a thousand a-year will go when you get a dozen children round you? I'll swear you haven't.'

'That subject has certainly not been tabled between us. But perhaps we may not have so many. Perhaps Providence may not bless us too heavily in that respect,' suggested Mr Luttrell, looking down bashfully on the carpet.

'You are sure to have a quiverful. The poorer a man is, the larger his family—that's a well-authenticated domestic fact. It's all very well for you to blink the fact now, but it won't take you

long to find out that life is made up of pounds, shillings, and pence. I wish I had faced the fact years ago,' concluded poor Mr Chester, with a pathetic sigh.

'I can't give her up,' said Luttrell, determinedly. 'Think me mean and dishonourable if you like, but I couldn't of my own free-will say the words that would set her free.' He rose and paced the room in his agitation. 'If she likes to turn me adrift, I must submit; but it must come from her.'

Mr Chester regarded him with amaze. Luttrell was so easy, so self-possessed, had usually so much of the calm bearing that distinguishes the man of the world, that he was the last from whom he would have expected such an outburst.

The other saw his surprise, and resumed his seat with some appearance of confusion.

'You have been in love yourself in your

time, I suppose ?' he asked, with an embarrassed smile.

'I have,' said Chester, relapsing readily into reminiscence. 'I won't mention names, but I don't mind telling you in strict confidence that I fell out of it quite as quickly as I ever fell into it. Love's raptures, my young friend, let me tell you, are short-lived with the most fervid of us.'

'Perhaps you were never so hard hit as I am.'

'By gad! though, I was. Your behaviour just now reminded me most closely of my own feelings. I used to stamp about the room, and sigh and groan, and write watery verses, and think it would all last for ever. Lord, Lord!' he concluded, with a commiserating smile, 'what a greenhorn I was! And you, my young friend—forgive the blunt speaking of a man who has been through it—are just such another.'

‘Possibly,’ said Luttrell affably.

Mr Chester felt it was useless to argue longer with this incorrigible man. He had done his duty, and that was enough.

‘You must go your own ways, I suppose,’ he said drily. ‘And in a few years’ time, when you’re overwhelmed with butchers’ and bakers’ and bootmakers’ bills, and you’ve a houseful of squalling babies, and you can’t get rest by day nor sleep by night for puzzling over how to make both ends meet—don’t forget that out of the fullness of my experience I warned you.’

‘I won’t forget. Neither will I forget to thank you for having confined yourself to warning—for having forborne to use your power of preventing my happiness.’

‘You’re a singular young man,’ said his future father-in-law, in a tone that was by no means unkindly. ‘There is something lamb-like in the way in which you skip and gambol along to your doom.’

I suppose I must tell my wife that my mission has proved a failure?’

‘If you please,’ answered he, laughing. Then changing his manner, he added with deep feeling,—‘Don’t think I am unable to appreciate the disadvantages of our marriage from a worldly point of view. It is because I am no longer a boy, because I am sure of myself, because I know that this is the crowning passion of my life, that I can smile at your warnings. Trust me enough for this—that all that steadfast love and care can do to compensate her for what she has renounced for me, shall be done. May God forget me in my last hour if I fail to make her life happy!’

The hands of the two men met in a close grasp. There was a suspicious winking in the eyelids of the elder man as he said, with an assumption of his old humorous tone,—

‘You’re an insinuating dog. If you can take in a tough old veteran like me, I don’t wonder at your having bewitched the girl. I’m sorry Mrs Chester didn’t hear that little bit; no woman could have held out against it. I suppose you couldn’t do it over again to her?’

‘I’m afraid not,’ said Luttrell, laughing. ‘I’m a poor muff at theatricals. I’m nothing if not spontaneous.’

And thus it came about that Mr Chester had but a sorry result to show when his wife eagerly demanded an account of this interview.

‘I talked to him like a father, Geraldine, but I might as well have talked to the chairs and tables. And, egad! I don’t wonder the girl being sweet on him; he could turn any woman round his finger in the twinkling of an eye. I wouldn’t trust you alone with him for five minutes, if you were ten years younger.

He rapped out a little bit of sentiment that made me feel like a fool—'pon my soul it did.'

His wife regarded him with a quiet scorn to which he was tolerably accustomed, but said little more than this,—

'At any rate, you must have been grateful to him for having given you such a novel sensation.'

But her husband's wit was equal to the occasion.

'I was, my dear, and still more grateful to you for having sent me on a fool's errand.'

Mrs Chester never relaxed in her dislike of this obstinate and unreasoning lover, never departed from her studied attitude of cold civility. But, as if to make amends for the hostility of this one uncompromising enemy, Luttrell was not long in insinuating himself into the good graces of the girls.

'I have almost made up my mind to forgive you,' Gertrude admitted to her

sister, in one of their confidential talks, as they wandered together in the grounds of Deepdale. 'There is a kind of caressing courtesy, a chivalry in his manner towards women, that renders him very charming. If I could for a moment imagine myself guilty of the weakness of marrying a man with under five thousand a-year, I should be tempted by a man something of Keith Luttrell's stamp.'

Lenore blushed rosy red with pleasure. Such an admission from Gertrude, that arch worshipper of the world and mammon, that ambitious spirit who trampled all the weaker feelings of female humanity under her feet, was indeed a justification of her lover.

'How to live will be a problem, certainly,' continued Gerty, in her clear, decided tones. 'You will have to take a box in the country and economise dur-

ing the winter months. And when I am married, you can pass the greater part of the season at my house.'

'Thank you, dear,' murmured the elder sister, overwhelmed with this generous vision of perennial hospitality. 'You were always too good.'

At that moment Luttrell joined them from an unexpected turning, and Gertrude welcomed him with a sisterly smile.

'I was just mapping out your campaign, Keith,' she explained to him graciously.

Like most worldly-minded and egotistical persons, she had a liberal deficiency of humour. She had, therefore, not the faintest idea that he was laughing at her, when he replied in a voice of commendable gravity,—

'I am sure your suggestions will be most valuable, Gerty.'

'I've been telling Lenore that you

must take a box in the country—a long way from a station, because then you will have less temptation to run to town.’ This was an afterthought which she adroitly slipped in, with a private nudge to her sister to direct attention to her wisdom. ‘And when I am married—which, in the nature of things, will be soon—you can spend the greater part of the season at my house. Lenore has always been my favourite, and I shall tolerate you,’ with gracious playfulness, ‘for the sake of your wife.’

‘It is a dazzling prospect,’ said Luttrell, with emotion. ‘But, Gerty, has it ever occurred to you that your husband might object to us?’

‘My husband object!’ she repeated, with an imperious toss of her head. ‘Do I look like a person who would let my husband have a will of his own?’

‘No, by Jove! you don’t,’ cried Luttrell

heartily, amused out of his commendable efforts to keep up the fun by a grave demeanour, while Lenore was quietly choking with laughter. 'I pit—I mean I envy the man to whom the foolish fiction of the law will give the title of your lord and master.'

'Let us talk seriously,' she said, vastly pleased with this last compliment, and taking an arm of each in order to increase the good understanding that already existed between them. 'Let us discuss ways and means. What ever are you both giggling at? You are getting as foolish as Katie and Chumleigh; they always annoy me with their giggling. I hope you are not going to degenerate into idiocy, like them.'

'Let us dissemble,' said Luttrell, with a wink at his betrothed, behind Gertrude's head. 'Well, my dear Gerty, to return to our muttons—we shall be humble folks,

certainly, but I trust not altogether unhappy. And I am sure, speaking for Lenore and myself, it will always afford us the sincerest pleasure to see you at that modest little retreat in the heart of the country which you have so obligingly planned for us. There *may* be times in your brilliant career when you will be glad of a little rest and quiet; and if you don't then make use of us, we shall really feel offended.'

'Thanks; you are very kind,' replied the young lady hastily, as if she did not particularly relish the prospect. 'But the one thing that troubles me most is to imagine what you will do with your evenings. In the summer you can get over the difficulty, because you can potter about the garden, and snip off the dead roses, and all that sort of thing. But in the winter, when dinner is over and the curtains are drawn, what *will* you do with yourselves?'

‘We must make out a list of our diversions for the week,’ said Luttrell, with unabated cheerfulness. ‘On Monday, say, we can play draughts; on Tuesday, Lenore can read to *me* out of “Paradise Lost;” on Wednesday I can read to *her* out of “The Pilgrim’s Progress;” on Thursday we can play whist with double-dummy; on Friday we can take another turn at draughts; and on Saturday—that being a particularly festive evening amongst poor people—we can go out marketing for the Sunday dinner.’

‘How absurd you are, Keith. Well, it is a comfort that you are blessed with such contented minds, for Lenore looks as vastly pleased with the programme as you. You must both be made of very different stuff from me. *I* cannot imagine myself sitting opposite a man every evening for the rest of my life, and thinking it felicity.’

‘But I don’t suppose we shall be alto-

gether such hermits as you picture,' observed Luttrell mildly. 'Now and again we shall probably indulge in a little modest recreation, to relieve the monotony that you so feelingly deplore. We shall have a money-box, into which we shall drop our pennies, and when we've saved up sufficient, we shall launch out into a small dinner-party. The *menu* will be limited, of course. I doubt if we shall ever get beyond tinned chicken and Gladstone claret—but those who are our real friends will not despise our humble efforts at festivity.'

There was one other member of the family besides Mrs Chester who did not take kindly to Luttrell, and that was Master Sydney. His small mind did not grasp the situation very fully, but he had a vague idea that the advent of this gentleman threatened to rob him

of his pet sister in the future, and to considerably curtail his enjoyment of her society in the present. Their introduction, to begin with, had not been a success. Luttrell, with well-meant but mistaken kindness, had gravely shaken the little man's hand, and inquired after his health, as if he had been a grown-up youth of fourteen. Sydney was not accustomed to such ceremonious proceedings on the part of his friends, and eyed his new acquaintance during the process with justifiable suspicion. Time and other circumstances increased this distrust, and Master Chester was not long in arriving at the conclusion that Luttrell was a poor creature, of no use at a game of ball or romps, and altogether totally unequal to the task of entertaining his juvenile betters.

'I don't think you're fond of children, Keith,' Lenore observed one day to her

lover, when they were sitting out in the grounds—Syd perched in his favourite position on her knee, one little arm thrown lovingly round her neck.

‘I adore them,’ answered Luttrell, trying to look as if he meant it, and failing dismally.

‘Don’t be a humbug, Keith. Your voice alone tells me you can’t endure them. I verily believe you don’t even like babies.’

‘I confess I draw the line at babies,’ admitted Mr Luttrell.

Lenore elevated her eyebrows in horror.

‘Do you mean to tell me that your heart does not yearn at the sight of a dear, little, chubby, pink baby? Don’t you want to pat its cheeks, and kiss it away?’

‘No, I don’t,’ he replied boldly. ‘I always hate calling at certain periods on a family where I am more than ordinarily

intimate, because the lady will insist upon showing me the last new baby. I prod the little animal in the cheeks, and set it squealing, and wonder whether I've injured it mortally.'

'I call it simply unnatural not to love them,' said Lenore warmly. 'You've shocked me very much, Keith.'

'I'm awfully sorry, but really, you know, you can't expect men to care much for the little beggars.'

'But men *do* care for them. There's Victor Hugo; he writes lovely verses on babies.'

'He's a Frenchman,' said Luttrell calmly. 'They're a gushing race, you know. If you say the word "Mother" to a Frenchman, he forthwith takes out his pocket-handkerchief and begins to weep copiously.'

Lenore was a little offended at these cavalier remarks. It was high treason,

in her estimation, for anybody to refuse to go down on his bended knees, and refuse to worship at the shrine of her beloved Sydney.

‘I can see nothing unmanly in being fond of children,’ she said presently, in an aggrieved tone. ‘There’s Robert Farquhar: there’s certainly nothing unmanly about him, and he adores Syd. And you love him, don’t you, darling?’ to her brother.

‘Yes,’ said that small gentleman, ‘I love Bobbie.’

‘And you don’t love me, I suppose?’ asked Luttrell.

Syd hesitated for a moment. Truth was struggling with good manners in his troubled soul. Truth prevailed.

‘I don’t think I love you,’ he said at length. ‘You’re not very nice to little boys.’

Luttrell smiled, but it was evident he was not over-pleased at this candid answer.

‘I daresay you wish your friend Bobbie, as you call him, were here now instead of me.’

‘Yes,’ answered the plain-spoken Sydney. ‘He would give me a ride, and play ball with me.’

Now, it was certainly very paltry of Luttrell to get out of temper with a child who had only answered the questions put to him according to his lights ; but I think it was Lenore’s ringing laugh that irritated him even more than Sydney’s avowed preference for the society of Farquhar.

‘Doesn’t it seem rather a pity,’ he said to Lenore, in a cross tone, ‘that, as you and this gentleman seem of one mind on so important a subject, the union between you couldn’t be a closer one than that of sentiment only ?’

Lenore fired up at once.

‘Oh, I daresay it’s not too late for that, if I choose,’ she said angrily.

A dark frown settled over Luttrell's face. He made no answer, however, but sat staring grimly before him at the landscape, giving private utterance, no doubt, to some very evil wishes against the absent Farquhar. Sydney looked from one to the other in great perplexity, wondering what was the matter. Presently his curiosity got the better of his discretion, and he asked in a loud whisper,—

‘Why doesn't he talk?’

‘Because he's a nasty, cross creature, and doesn't love little boys,’ replied Lenore promptly, flashing a fierce glance at the immovable Luttrell, who continued to preserve a stony silence.

Syd, who had brought his ball with him in case of contingencies, swiftly turned the occasion to his own advantage.

‘Let's leave him, then, and go and have a game,’ he suggested, in a louder whisper than before.

‘Come along,’ cried the girl merrily, springing up.

In half-a-minute they were hard at work. And a very pretty picture they made, even to the jaundiced eyes of Luttrell, who could not refrain from furtively watching them; she with her lithe, supple figure, bounding after the fair-haired little fellow who made the welkin ring with his merry shouts and childish laughter. They were a pair of babies in their fun, in their innocence and inexperience of any but their own small world. He watched them till their merriment lulled to rest the jealous devil which had been momentarily evoked, and prompted him to join them.

‘Forgive me, Lenore; I spoke and behaved like a cad,’ he said humbly. ‘Let me see if I can’t make myself as popular with the little man as my betters.’

He set to work at once, and with apparent goodwill, but it was not in his nature to adapt himself gracefully to the requirements of youth. He threw the ball either too high or too low, and altogether acquitted himself so awkwardly that Sydney was not to be blamed if his deep-rooted conviction, that Bobbie was worth a hundred of his new friend, gained additional strength from so sorry an exhibition.

‘Can’t you understand that I’m jealous of every thought of yours?’ Luttrell said to her later on. ‘You seem to love your little brother more than you do me.’

‘It is such a different love, Keith,’ she answered softly. Did not all the woman in her thrill with secret joy at the knowledge of her power over him which those words conveyed? ‘He came to us like a gift from the angels ;

and he is such a darling, and so fragile and delicate. But I love you too, dear, as—a girl can only love her first lover.'

Her eyes were lifted to his, the humid light of love shining in their lustrous depths, the roseate flush of feeling was on the fair, kindling cheek, as she spoke. What was there in that liquid gaze, wherein the innocence of a child seemed blended with the newly-born passion of the woman, that made Luttrell's own eyes droop before it, as if abashed?

'Don't make me into a hero, child,' he said humbly; 'I'm far from being that.'

'You are my hero,' she answered proudly.

'Is it not strange,' he resumed, in a musing tone, 'how extremes meet? Your uncle is a hardened old cynic,

and that little fellow who has just run away from us is a baby with nothing but his instincts to guide him, and yet they both agree in distrusting me. And, stranger still than even their distrust of me, is their mutual liking for your red-haired friend Farquhar. I wonder if the fellow is at bottom a much better man than I am?'

Lenore laughed merrily, as it seemed, in playful scorn of her lover's suggestion of his inferiority to any man under the sun.

'Of course it is easy to understand why Uncle Dacre never took kindly to you; he couldn't take the liberties with you that he could with others. And as for Syd, he doesn't care for you much, because you don't understand how to amuse him.'

It is never a very difficult task to restore to a man his normal good

opinion of himself. Mr Luttrell brightened up considerably at his betrothed's explanation.

‘I think, after all, I’m as good as the average,’ he observed modestly.

What a noble creature he was! thought Lenore to herself; how unassuming, how ready to depreciate himself for a little cause. This was the man whom Sir Timothy had described as vain and conceited. Owl-like Sir Timothy, thus to revile his superiors!





CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS FROM DACRE.

I DON'T know whether our acquaintance is sufficiently long to enable us to be confidential with each other,' observed Joseph Chumleigh, in his quaint way, to Luttrell, as the two men were walking together from the town one day. 'If so, I should like to hear your candid opinion of Mrs Chester.'

Luttrell laughed.

'I made a vow a short time ago that I would never speak evil of anybody until I was at least ten miles away from where he or she lived.'

‘You have admitted quite enough,’ observed Chumleigh quietly. ‘You lead me to infer that if you did speak, you wouldn’t use the language of compliment. A wonderful woman in her way, I grant; great force of character, and all that. As the mother-in-law of somebody else, she would be a highly entertaining and instructive study. As one’s own mother-in-law,’—he paused, and then added with tremendous emphasis, ‘a caution to snakes.’

‘I should say that it is a characteristic of the Dacre family to make themselves disagreeable to those with whom they are intimately associated. Sir Herbert, as I daresay you’ve heard, carries the art to the highest degree of perfection. At the same time,’ observed Luttrell candidly, ‘I can hardly expect Mrs Chester to show me the best side of her character. She naturally thinks her

daughter is throwing herself away, and there is hardly a mother in England who wouldn't hold the same opinion.'

'Perhaps you are right. I'll admit that where Mrs Chester is concerned I'm not an impartial critic. Any way, I can't imitate your forbearance; I suffered too much, in my pre-engaged days, from her animosity,' replied Chumleigh. 'All the same, as a friend, I would advise you to look out for squalls.'

'What do you mean?' asked the other lover, alarmed at the solemn manner in which this warning was given.

'I mean this,' said Joseph Chumleigh, 'our mother-in-law elect is a woman of wonderful resources—a woman who will rather die than surrender, like that jolly old French marshal at Waterloo, I forget his name.'

'Never mind his name,' suggested Luttrell.

‘All right. Mrs Chester is that gentleman in petticoats. She seems to have accepted the fact of your engagement, but it is just as likely as not that she is plotting secretly against you. Therefore, I repeat, look out for squalls.’

‘Mrs Chester may be all that you say, but I don’t think she will be able to change Lenore,’ said Luttrell, with the proud confidence of a lover.

Joseph Chumleigh was as good-natured a man as ever breathed, and the sickly weed of envy was not likely to take root in so open and honest a soul. Still, he was not without an uneasy suspicion that his own Katie would not have made the same stout fight for *him* that Lenore had made for her lover. And this suspicion rendered him just a little resentful of Luttrell’s confident answer.

‘Don’t be too sure of that, my boy,’ he said rather sharply. ‘You are only one

against all the family. The two girls were as much against it as the mother.'

'I am exceedingly obliged to them,' observed Luttrell haughtily; and although he endeavoured to infuse a careless contempt into his tone, the other could see that the flush of mortification rose to his cheek. And noting this, Chumleigh's ill-humour vanished directly. It was as well perhaps for his ultimate moral benefit, and in the interests generally of plainer men than himself, that Keith Luttrell should occasionally be taken down a bit. But the generous Joseph had no wish to prolong the process; so, when he spoke next, it was in his usual genial way.

'I've had a hard fight for it myself, and I don't want to see you dished at the last moment. Therefore, if you won't think me impertinent for saying so much, I should advise you to hasten the mar-

riage. Our wedding comes off in two months; suppose you and Lenore get tied up at the same time? The idea is worth considering, at all events.'

Luttrell did not say much at the time in answer to this proposition, for, to tell the truth, he was just a little offended by Chumleigh's suggestion that it might be possible for Lenore to give him up in obedience to the wishes of her family. And I am bound to say that it was his love, not his vanity, which was wounded by the suggestion. Still, when he came to think calmly over the matter, he was forced to admit to himself that the ground he stood on was certainly less secure than it might have been. A speedy marriage, while the romantic glow of novelty was still fresh upon their love, would be a wise proceeding on his part, and he resolved to propose this to Lenore.

At first she demurred, and hesitated, and

protested, in the pretty, trifling manner common to young girls when pressed by an ardent lover to do something out of the common to prove their affection. But after a considerable display of eloquence on the part of Luttrell, relieved now and then by a performance of an osculatory nature, she gave in, and expressed herself ready to accede to his wishes in the matter.

‘All the same, I sha’n’t make half such a good wife as if you had given me more time,’ she observed merrily. ‘As our income will be so small, I want to prepare myself for my duties. There’s a heap of books I want to study, such as “A Nice Little Dinner for Every Day in the Year,” and “How to Manage a Small Household.” For, you know, dearest Keith,’ she added gravely, ‘however much a man may love his wife, he is sure to be a bear if his dinner isn’t nice. You may be able to

dine off me for the first week or so, but after that you'll want something more substantial.'

Of course, he took her in his arms, and vowed that such mundane things as dinners would be of no importance, and that as long as he kept body and soul together on a chop or something equally luxurious, he should be a contented man. Still, I think Lenore was quite wise to treat all this as moonshine, and prepare herself for the future by the study of such erudite works as she had named.

Mrs Chester regarded this speedy marriage as a crowning indecency to an altogether shameful affair. Mr Chester mildly wondered why the deuce they were in such a hurry. Gertrude, on the whole, condescended to approve of the arrangement, for reasons which were certainly not complimentary to the parties concerned.

‘They may just as well be out of the way, for any good we get out of them,’ she observed, with her usual bluntness. ‘They are always sneaking about by themselves in all sorts of out-of-the-way corners, like a couple of burglars planning a robbery. And when one does drop on them by chance, they look as black as thunder. And when you come upon them in the house, they look so guilty and confused, you can see with half an eye they’ve just been kissing, or holding each other’s hands, or some absurdity of that sort. It’s an awful bore, you know, to remember to cough, or rattle the door-handle, every time you go into the room. I’ve had no experience of such matters, of course,’ she concluded loftily, ‘but really it seems to me that so much love-making before marriage is not quite decent. Did you go on in that absurd fashion when you were courting, papa?’ she asked,

abruptly turning to her father, to whom she had been privately delivering this indignant tirade.

Mr Chester considered a little before he replied to this somewhat delicate question.

‘That halcyon period of my life has been succeeded and overlaid, as it were, by such troublous and stormy events,’ he said at length, ‘that I cannot recall it very distinctly. I believe, however, my conduct was such, that a well-regulated young lady like yourself has no cause to blush for her father.’

A few days later, Lenore and her lover having stolen forth on one of those secret expeditions which so excited Gertrude’s ire, a letter arrived for Mrs Chester, the contents of which were speedily communicated to all the members of the family within reach, and excited within them feelings of the liveliest emotion. When it was

found that Lenore was missing, Katie was at once dispatched in search of her.

The lovers had made up their minds to pass an agreeable afternoon together in a way that previous experience had taught them was eminently successful. Their dreams were abruptly and rudely dispelled by the irruption of Katie.

‘I am so sorry to disturb you,’ she apologised, — who should know better than an engaged young lady how provoking it is to a couple of lovers to be popped upon by a third person just when they have made up their minds for a lengthened spell of billing and cooing? — ‘but I was obliged to come and tell you the news. What in the world do you think has happened?’

They both professed themselves unable to hazard a conjecture, of course, and then she told them that her mother had just had a brief note from Mrs Partlet, to

the effect that Sir Herbert Dacre had died suddenly in a seizure similar to that which had attacked him during Lenore's visit at the Court.

A somewhat awe-struck silence succeeded her delivery of the news. To the most young and thoughtless, there is a something in that stern message of Death which chills the heart and casts a gloom over the sunniest spirit.

Luttrell was the first to speak.

'Poor old man! He will never make himself offensive to anybody again. I suppose the girls will look upon it as a deliverance from bondage.'

'Poor old man!' echoed Lenore musingly. 'Although I knew so little of him, he was so kind to me while I was there that I cannot help feeling touched. If there were any softer traits in his nature, I believe I was the only one who saw a glimpse of them. The saddest

thing about it is that he should have lived his life in such a fashion that nobody will honestly mourn him.'

They walked back to the house, the dead man being naturally the theme of their conversation more or less for the remainder of the day. The funeral was to take place immediately—there being in his case no loving mourner who grudged the cold earth its guest and would delay the parting to the very last. Mr and Mrs Chester would have to start for Dacre Court to-morrow, and, as a consequence of their departure, it was necessary that Luttrell should leave Deepdale too.

It was not a serious parting. He was to return in a fortnight, and one would think that the most ardent lovers might have looked forward to such a brief separation with equanimity. But for the few hours that were still left them,

a strange depression fell upon these young people. Luttrell was abstracted and silent, Lenore's eyes kept filling with foolish tears that she was ashamed to let him see.

The day was one of the fairest that could be seen, although the month of October was almost upon them. The sea was a sheet of liquid silver; the skies of a perfect blue, unstained by a passing cloud. And yet, to both, as they leaned over the wall, looking on the sands below them, there was something mournful in the low, murmuring song of the waves that at another time would have seemed a pleasing music. And when he took her in his arms for the last farewell, she cried like a child.

'I don't know why I am so foolish,' she said, amid her tears. 'Anybody would think you were going to India or the Cape. I do so wish you could

stay. If Joseph Chumleigh had had any sense, he would have asked you to stop at his place, and then you could have come over here every day. I never thought to envy Katie her lover, but at the present moment I do wish you were Chumleigh.'

He soothed her and 'cheered her soul with love,' and whispered that their troubles would all be over in two months, and that the deaths of forty Uncle Dacres would not part them then. And, after a fashion, she suffered herself to be comforted, and allowed him to depart in time to catch his train. But all the same she could not watch the carriage that drove him away for her tears.

It was a very dull house, as poor Gertrude found to her cost. With father and mother away, Katie and Joseph 'mooning about'—as she phrased it—by themselves, and Lenore melan-

choly and silent, this high - spirited damsel had every right to consider herself ill-used.

‘I don’t wish to be uncharitable, but it looks to me very like affectation—all that absurd moping,’ she observed to Mr Chumleigh. ‘He writes her yards every day—there were two stamps on yesterday’s letter—and she writes him back yards in return. Surely that’s enough. I used to think you and Katie excessively foolish,’ she explained candidly, ‘but you quite shine out in comparison with *them*. I’m sure if *you* left her for a fortnight, Katie wouldn’t go about the house like a ghost.’

‘Katie is of a different temperament,’ observed Chumleigh drily, feeling that this was a dubious compliment which had been paid him.

‘Fortunate for her she is,’ sniffed Miss Gertrude contemptuously. ‘A pretty

fright Lenore will have made herself by the time that he does come back. He'll be thinking she won't wear well; that's the way with you men. You never thank us for your devotion, if it takes the form of making us look a little less beautiful.'

'Your remarks, my dear Gertrude, are distinguished by a wisdom and knowledge of the world beyond your years,' said Mr Chumleigh, with a quiet satire. 'At the same time, I don't think there is any need for *you* to apprehend the danger you describe so eloquently. I have known you now for many years, and the result of my acquaintance is a firm conviction that your emotions will never be acute enough to impair your beauty. Your *rôle* through life, unless I am greatly mistaken, will be that of the amiable worldling.'

'I suppose you mean that for chaff?'

replied the young lady scornfully ; ‘but, let me tell you, I take it as a compliment. The world would be soon brought to a pretty pass if all the women in it were made of the namby-pamby stuff that you men profess to prefer.’

Chumleigh said no more, long experience having taught him that, if there was one privilege especially claimed by the female sex for which Gertrude would fight to the death more than for another, it was for the privilege of having the last word.

‘I think,’ he said meekly, taking his tobacco-pouch from his pocket, ‘that, with your kind permission, I will go and have a smoke. A man’s nervous system requires soothing after such a taking down as you’ve given me.’





CHAPTER IX.

A HARD CHOICE.

WE can't make anything satisfactory out of it,' said Katie despairingly, as she looked for the twentieth time at the telegram which had been despatched to them from Dacre Court by their father,—‘We shall arrive at Deepdale by the 5.30 train; all news when we meet.’

‘All news when we meet,’ repeated Gertrude, in a thoughtful tone. ‘There seems to me something cheerful in the wording of that sentence. If there has been disappointment, would he have had

the heart to add anything to the bare announcement of the train they were coming by? At the same time, if he had had his wits about him, he might have put "all right," or something to have relieved our anxiety. I can't think how people can be so thoughtless, for my part.'

'I believe it will be all right,' said Lenore hopefully. Much to the relief of Gertrude, she had begun to rally from that strange depression caused by the departure of Luttrell, and to look her old, bright self again. 'I have heard mamma say a hundred times that there were two things the Dacres were always noted for, —keeping their promises, and never forgetting an injury or an insult.'

'He must have forgiven Sydney's affront, or he wouldn't have chosen to benefit him in this roundabout way,' laughed Katie. 'I wonder how much the old man will leave.'

‘Suppose we make an experimental calculation ourselves,’ observed Gertrude briskly. ‘It will while away the time, and take off the strain of expectation. He has lived in a pretty miserly style for twenty years, so we will assume that on an average he has put by ten thousand per annum. In twenty years that would amount to two hundred thousand pounds. Then there’s the compound interest for that period. Suppose we put it at a hundred thousand,’ she said liberally. ‘Altogether, a total of over three hundred thousand. A nice little sum!’

‘Better err on the safe side,’ suggested Lenore; ‘put it at a quarter of a million.’

‘A quarter of a million, then,’ pursued this rapid young calculator. ‘Well, then, the next thing is, how will he divide it? Forty thousand to us, another forty thousand, say, in odd directions. That leaves over two hundred thousand for

the Partlets. A nice little lump each those girls will have. Dear me! I wish I were a man; wouldn't I go in for one of them without loss of time.'

'Don't talk so flippantly, Gerty,' interposed Katie reprovingly. Since her engagement to Mr Chumleigh, she had rather taken to playing the maternal with her irrepressible youngest sister. 'I declare, your tone seems to deteriorate every day.'

Gertrude opened her magnificent eyes to the fullest extent.

'Really, Katie, you are just a little too-too, as the æsthetic people say. I can't see that *you* have any right to get on the stilts. Now, if Lenore had said that, I would have taken it with a good grace, because she has just proved the courage of her opinions by engaging herself to a poor man. But everybody knows that you wouldn't have said Yes

to Joseph Chumleigh if his pockets had not happened to be well lined.'

Katie turned a furious red at this uncompromising thrust, and walked haughtily away, leaving the others alone.

'You shouldn't have spoken so thoughtlessly,' said the ever-compassionate Lenore. 'I'm afraid you've wounded her deeply.'

'Fiddlesticks!' cried the unabashed Gerty. 'If there is one thing in the world I do hate, it is humbug of that sort. Katie is a good sort of girl enough, but she is quite incapable of anything heroic. So am I, but then I acknowledge it, while she plays the hypocrite and pretends there is not an ounce of worldliness in her composition. It's all fudge.'

'I think she is very fond of Joseph,' protested Lenore mildly.

'I've no doubt she is, in her way, but then she would have been just as fond

of Jack Brown or Tom Jones, if he had turned up under similar circumstances. Do you know, Lenore,' she added confidentially, 'I believe that, for all practical purposes, you can divide women into three categories—the woman who can care for anybody, the woman who can care for only one, and the woman who can care really for nobody but herself. Katie is a specimen of the first, you of the second, and I—well, I believe I'm a tolerably fair specimen of the third.'

'Oh, Gerty, don't say that,' cried Lenore, shocked at this hardened confession. 'I'm sure you love me, for one.'

'You are my favourite, certainly, and I would do a good deal for you,' admitted Gertrude calmly; 'but still, I am one of those people who consider it a duty to take care of number one. And after all, my dear, isn't it much the wiser course? Katie would pretend, I suppose, that we

ought to think of each other first—that I should think of you, and you think of me. What a much shorter cut it is for us each to look after ourselves, and how much better it is generally done. Dear me! five o'clock. In another hour we shall know for certain—forty thousand or nothing.'

As if to add to the agony of expectation, the train was considerably behind its time. It was nearly seven o'clock before Mr and Mrs Chester reached Deepdale, and there was such a gravity in their manner, their faces wore so peculiar an expression, that the girls' hearts sank within them.

'Disappointment?' questioned Gerty eagerly.

It was Mr Chester who answered, in a voice that was remarkable for its constraint.

‘No; he has kept his word; the forty thousand is Lenore’s as he promised.’

‘Ours, yours, not mine, papa,’ she interrupted eagerly. ‘You know for what purpose it was left; you do not think so meanly of me as to imagine that I would touch a penny of it for myself.’

Still, there was that same peculiar restraint about both—a restraint altogether remarkable under the circumstances. As the girls looked at each other in mute interrogation, Mr Chester turned to his wife, and said in a husky voice,—

‘Geraldine, it had better be told now, had it not?’

Mrs Chester bowed her head for answer, and they could see that her face was pale, and her lips trembling. Her father went up slowly to Lenore and put his hand upon her shoulder. The tears were standing in his eyes.

‘My child,’ he said, in a broken voice,

'we bring you very bad news. The money is left to you, but with a condition attached to it.'

In the silence that followed you could have heard a pin drop. Gertrude and Katie stood with blanched faces, apprehensive of the coming evil to their sister. Then a ray of light seemed suddenly to fall upon the girl, and with a smothered sob she threw herself into her father's arms.

'Oh, father, father! I know what you would say. I can guess what the condition is.'

The careless, debonair nature of the man was touched by that cry of a breaking heart, as it had not been for years. For a moment he could not answer her for his own tears; then he spoke in faltering tones.

'My poor darling, you must choose between us and your lover. The money

is yours—*on the condition that you do not marry Keith Luttrell.*

Who shall say that in this case coming events had not cast their shadows before? In what other way could she account for that persistent and mysterious depression which had settled on her from the first moment that her lover's departure was spoken of? Why was it that in parting with him—for what they both believed to be so short an interval—she had felt as if the light of life itself were being withdrawn from her?’

‘What reason does he give?’ she asked, as soon as her dry, parched lips could frame themselves to speech.

Her father pulled a letter from his pocket.

‘In the will itself he assigns no reason, but here is a letter directed to you, which may explain it, if such an act of cruelty can be explained.’

He held it out to her, but she waved it away.

‘I could not see a letter,’ she said brokenly. ‘Read it for me. Though it matters little what he says; it cannot alter that cruel condition.’

Amid the painful silence of them all, the unhappy girl whom its contents concerned sitting pale and motionless as a statue, Mr Chester read out Sir Herbert Dacre’s letter,—

‘MY DEAR LENORE,—It needs no great knowledge of human nature to tell me that when you learn the condition attached to my bequest, you will stigmatise me as a harsh, unfeeling tyrant, who set himself deliberately to the task of rendering two human beings miserable. When I tell you, further, that I overheard Mr Luttrell’s complimentary allusion to me on that afternoon when

I surprised you both, you will no doubt attribute my action to an old man's vindictiveness. This will not be true: I have studied Mr Luttrell's character at my leisure, and was not at all surprised at the callous and unfeeling way in which he spoke of an old man nearly in his grave. I should have expected nothing better from a mere butterfly of fashion, an idle loungeur about town, such as he has proved himself.

'At the same time, my concern for your welfare—you will smile at this, no doubt, and stigmatise it as hypocrisy—has led me to do what lies in my power to prevent you from throwing yourself away on a man who, I am firmly convinced, is so little deserving of the sacrifice. My long experience of the world has induced me to take a very unfavourable view of love-matches, when

poverty is one of the principal ingredients. It is because I can picture your lot so clearly a few years hence as the wife of Keith Luttrell, that I have done my best to rescue you from it. In the first moments of this rude shattering of your girlish romance, you will hate me, you will execrate my memory—any man who attempts to benefit his fellow-creatures must count upon such ingratitude for his reward. But later on, when you have gained a larger insight into the world and human nature; when you have proved, in watching the career of others, how dangerous it is to allow the feelings to be your sole guide in the most important acts of a woman's life; when you have chosen your future helpmeet in life for more solid advantages than his *beaux yeux*, his handsome figure, and his capacity for making pretty speeches—you will then own that I was cruel

only to be kind. I need say no more. If I were to write on for fifty pages, I should fail to convince you *now*. Time will convince you with an eloquence of which I am incapable.—Your affectionate uncle,
HERBERT DACRE.'

Artfully constructed as it was, that letter deceived nobody. This paltry revenge was on a par with the rest of his character. The man who had resented, by long years of silence and estrangement, an innocent little child's unwitting affront to his personal appearance, who had bullied and tyrannised over his helpless nieces until their lives had been more or less of a prolonged torture—who could have expected any nobility of nature, even on his death-bed, from so paltry a creature? The hand that, living, had never failed to strike the weak and defenceless, could

strike still more keenly and remorselessly from the tomb.

Algernon Chester rose, and crossing over to the hapless girl, laid his hand with unwonted tenderness on her bowed head.

‘My child,’ he said gravely, ‘it is a terrible ordeal for you. But remember that you are free to choose between us and Keith Luttrell. Nobody in this house’—he glanced sternly at his wife as he spoke—‘shall attempt to influence you, on pain of my everlasting displeasure. If the sacrifice is too great, let the money go. We shall be no poorer than before.’

It was Gertrude who spoke next.

‘To whom does the money go, if Lenore should decide not to give up Luttrell?’ she asked abruptly.

‘To Selina,’ answered her father.

‘I think I see a way out of the

difficulty,' said the girl, in a brisk tone that caused them all to look up. 'She might be able to make some compromise, and have the satisfaction of outwitting him into the bargain. Of course, Selina would prefer to have the forty thousand pounds intact—that is human nature. But if Lenore appears determined to give up Keith rather than let the money go, Selina might be willing to enter into a bargain—to take, say, ten thousand, and let her marry.'

'I can't say I quite catch your idea,' observed Mr Chester.

Gertrude's countenance wore a visible expression of contempt for the dull intelligences by which she was surrounded, as she went on in voluble explanation.

'Let me put it as clearly as possible. Lenore says to Selina: I have two propositions to make to you. The first is, I give up Keith, and you don't touch

a penny. The second is, I marry Keith, the forty thousand goes to you by the strict letter of the will, and you refund me thirty thousand. If you accept the second preposition, you gain ten thousand. *Now* do you see?’

It must be owned that there was an ingenuity, a power of mental resource about this suggestion, which would not have been unworthy of Sir Herbert himself in his palmiest days. But Lenore destroyed its feasibility at once by answering, with a sad smile,—

‘He provided too cleverly for that, Gerty. He couldn’t have chosen a better guardian of his intentions, one more likely to take care that I should not evade the compact. Selina is in love with Keith herself. That is why he chose her.’

There was no shirking the ordeal. On

the one side were those to whom she was bound by all the ties and associations of her young life ; on the other, the man to whom two months ago she was an utter stranger, whom she loved now with all her soul and strength. To keep her faith to him, she must renounce those to whom she owed her being ; she must deliberately put away from herself the chance of benefiting them, of making their future bright and pleasant, of lifting from them this heavy burden of debt. She would have been less than human if, in those bitter hours of anguish and struggle, she had not cursed the hour when she set foot in Dacre Court. On the one side pleaded duty and honour, whispering that to forsake her own would be base and unwomanly ; on the other spoke, with its terrible eloquence, the broken and despairing voice of love.

Oh, the anguish of that struggle ! the

torture of that long vigil in which her heart seemed rent in twain, and a bitterness greater than that of death fell upon her young life! To have died now, in the full flush of her new-born love, with her hand in his, his kisses upon her brow, his voice soothing the dark passage to the shadowy land—*that* would have been easy in comparison. But to look forward to the long joyless years without him, to picture the day when she should hear of his marriage to another—for what man yet ever kept constant to a memory?—oh! this was harder than death.

The grey dawn broke, and found her, haggard, sad-eyed, looking almost like an old woman, with thin, drawn cheeks, and pallid, quivering lips. The rosy lights of morn flushed the sleeping world with splendour; the gay sunbeams stole through the window and flecked the room with dancing waves of light: like

one in a dream, she heard the far-off murmur of the sea, the song of the waking birds. Once all these things had seemed to breathe a message of joy, had seemed to be in harmony with her own delight in life. But now it seemed that the sun had shone, the birds had sung, the flowers had bloomed for the last time on the day when she bade her lover good-bye.

Two days later, she wrote to her lover the letter that conveyed the sentence of separation. How her trembling fingers guided the pen to form the words aright, she never knew. The sentences were simple enough, but eloquent with the anguish of a breaking heart, and blotted here and there with her tears. To the day of his death Luttrell kept that letter—that sad, pathetic letter—which brought to so cruel an end the sweetest, if not the only romance of his life.

In a postscript she had told him it was best for them not to see each other again, but by return came a few lines, concluding with the words, 'I *must* bid you good-bye.'





CHAPTER X.

A GENEROUS OFFER.

T WILL do Lenore's family the justice to admit that not one of them was capable of estimating the strength and intensity of her love for Luttrell. They regarded it as a wrench—a nasty, ugly, unpleasant wrench, if you will—but still one that would leave no permanent ill effects upon her future. Keith Luttrell, judged from a feminine point of view, was a singularly handsome and attractive man, but there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it; and in the years, or even the months to come,

some other young man, equally handsome and attractive, would find it an easy task to console her.

Who shall blame them if their capacity for sympathy was limited? Katie and Gertrude could only judge of another woman's feelings by their own. The one liked her Joseph with a mild affection, quite sufficient to make her a good wife; but if misfortune had fallen on poor Joseph to-morrow, she would have given him up with a tranquil regret, and in the course of time united herself to any decent gentleman who could have provided her with a good home. As for Gertrude, we have seen enough of her character to make sure that love was a luxury in which she did not intend to indulge. How could either of these girls, good and kind-hearted girls as they were, understand truly a sister who was made up of romance, emotion, passion, of every

quality that seemed foreign to either the Chester or Dacre type of temperament?

It was hard, cruelly hard, for her to have to give up her lover. Not one of them ever harboured a doubt as to her decision from the very beginning. She would weep and fret for a little time, grow thin and pale, perhaps. But Time, that great healer of all sorrows and trials, would blur Luttrell's image, and prepare the way for his successor. So they reasoned.

The only one who went near to fathoming the truth was Joseph Chumleigh. Why he should have displayed a more accurate knowledge of her character than those whose lives had been entwined with her own, is not easy to say. Perhaps, under his own calm, almost phlegmatic exterior, he himself hid a volcanic temperament—as some of these quiet men

do, deceiving all with whom they come into contact.

‘It is infamous, horrible!’ he said, pacing the room in his agitation, when Mr Chester had made known to him the conditions of Herbert Dacre’s will. ‘The poor girl’s life will be utterly wrecked. She idolises Luttrell.’

Mr Chester shifted uneasily in his chair. He had been tender enough with Lenore the night before; for it was not in the man’s nature to be harsh or cruel. But then he had never doubted in his own mind the issue of the struggle. Compelled to choose between her family and her lover, it would have been almost unnatural for any girl to pronounce against her own flesh and blood, in favour of a man she had only known for a few weeks. Chumleigh’s fervent words and tones seemed to put a new aspect on the whole thing—to

speak of her as a victim whom they were selfishly immolating for their own advantage.

‘I hope, Chumleigh, you clearly understand that no pressure is being put upon her here,’ he said a little stiffly. ‘It is a matter entirely for her own judgment, her own feelings.’

‘Of course, I know you haven’t, in so many words, asked her to give him up,’ answered the other bluntly. ‘But a girl of Lenore’s sensibility is not likely to think that she has practically any choice in the matter.’

‘It is a most undesirable match ; we were all of that opinion before this happened. Personally, I like Luttrell, but the girl would simply be throwing herself away on him. It is very little harder than if we had refused our consent in the first instance.’

In such easy fashion did Mr Chester

make light of the sacrifice. And yet last night he had told her to let the money go, if she found that sacrifice too hard. Impressionable as wax, he was never in the same mind for two hours together.

‘First love is the sweetest and the most romantic; so say the poets and novelists,’ he resumed presently, in those easy, airy tones of his. ‘But how few people ever marry their first love, and yet the majority of them don’t find life has greatly lost its savour in consequence. I remember my first love well. What a lovely girl she was—*such* a figure, *such* eyes, such a smile! Egad, Chumleigh, it makes me young again to think of it!’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr Chumleigh grimly, ‘Mind Mrs Chester isn’t anywhere within earshot of your raptures.’

‘You’re of a cold temperament, Chumleigh; you can’t sympathise properly with these reminiscences. Well, to resume.

How mad I was about that girl! When I heard the news of her engagement to another, I can't describe my feelings. I thought I was going to die; I give you my word I did.'

Chumleigh turned away his face to hide the look of contempt which came over it. It was too much to be forced to listen to this jaunty creature's history of emotions he was incapable of feeling, when, a few yards off from him, there was a fair young girl breaking her heart with real grief.

'Nobody could have been more hard hit than I was; nobody could have suffered more than I did—Lenore inherits my temperament, I am sorry to say,' pursued Mr Chester solemnly, happily unconscious of his companion's disgust. 'And yet, six months after, I fell in love again—fell in love with, and married, Geraldine Dacre. It's a wise

provision of nature, Chumleigh, that we are easily consoled; that the affections must fasten upon something; that, like nature, they abhor a vacuum.'

'Look here, Chester,' exclaimed Chumleigh, abruptly breaking in upon this moralising, 'I want to help Lenore, if I can. I know what stuff the girl is made of; I know what this sacrifice will cost her. You would take the money from a man you hated, simply because he is dead. Why refuse to accept help from a man because he is living? Let me lend you the money at a low, a nominal percentage.'

If Joseph Chumleigh had only been blessed with a little more tact, a shade more knowledge of a certain phase of human nature, I think he would have been able to leave Deepdale that day with the knowledge that he had made two human beings supremely happy, at

what was, after all, a trifling cost to a man of his wealth. But the Chester pride rose in arms against the suggestion of a pecuniary favour. The owner of those heavily mortgaged acres drew himself up stiffly. The proposition had been put too bluntly. An ounce more of diplomacy, a shade more of circumlocution, and Algernon Chester would have seen his way to accept.

‘You mean well, Chumleigh, and I thank you for your kindness to me and mine. But it is out of the question. You didn’t intend it, I know—but you have unconsciously pained me very much; you have brought home to me my position.’

Mr Chester sank down, and appeared quite overcome. Joseph Chumleigh regarded him with a puzzled air; such extreme delicacy was a little beyond his comprehension.

‘Sorry if I’ve offended you,’ he muttered. ‘I meant well.’

‘I know you did,’ replied the man of many words, in a more genial tone. ‘Lenore, as I’ve told you before, is a free agent. I told her last night that she could let the money go. And, egad, Chumleigh,’—here his whole manner changed as by magic; the old, careless ring was in his voice, the old merry twinkle in his eye,—‘I don’t know that we should be much the worse if she did. With her seasons in town, her balls and her what not, Mrs Chester will soon make ducks and drakes of it.’

For the life of him, Chumleigh could not help firing one parting shot.

‘If such is your opinion, what a pity you don’t give Lenore the benefit of it, and let her keep her lover.’

Mr Chester’s visage clouded at this candid retort.

‘You are a good fellow, Chumleigh,’ he said, with a resumption of his previous stateliness ; ‘but pardon me for saying that you are a little wanting in the tact and delicacy that invariably accompany a susceptible organisation. This is entirely a family matter, and your interference is—ahem!—not quite warranted, even by the relationship you will shortly bear to us. You will greatly oblige me by considering the subject closed.’

And so poor Chumleigh rode away from Deepdale very dissatisfied with his visit, very cast down at the knowledge that he had utterly failed in doing the good he had hoped. The vision of a pale, sad face, seen through the window of one of the upper rooms as he walked his horse slowly past the house, tended to deepen his depression. Was it his own fault? Had he blundered in some way? On what grounds was it possible

to explain this delicacy which shrank from borrowing his money when freely offered, but which did not recoil from accepting the sacrifice of a young girl's life? Over and over again during his ride home did he put this question to himself, but he invariably failed to find a satisfactory answer. Was it that the man was too completely under the thumb of his wife to dare to follow his own feelings in the matter, and was all this assumption of wounded pride mere acting? Of course he knew that Mrs Chester hated him—Joseph Chumleigh—so deeply, that she would rather break the hearts of all her daughters than accept the semblance of a favour at his hands.





CHAPTER XI.

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART!

MR CHESTER stood upon the hearthrug of the library at Deepdale, awaiting the arrival of Keith Luttrell. It was from this room that the finest view of the park was to be obtained, and as he glanced now and again through the window at the fair prospect, rendered doubly fair by the brilliant beams of a warm autumn sun, it is not unlikely that he felt some elation at the thought that these ancient acres were at length redeemed.

All the same, in spite of this not un-

natural elation, his expression was worried and anxious. He was a man, as we know, who hated scenes of any sort, and in his heart he said that Luttrell had made an ungenerous use of his privileges in demanding this last interview. There would be faintings, hysterics, on the part of Lenore, in all probability. And in such a contingency it would be impossible for him, as the head of the house, to act gracefully. For Mr Chester had this disadvantage, as compared with his wife, that he could see two sides of a question. And he had an uneasy conviction that a man with reasonable generosity of temperament could not have accepted such a sacrifice from a daughter.

This, more than a mere dim suspicion that there were other fathers in the world who would have acted differently, made him shrink nervously from the meeting with the unfortunate lover. Luttrell might

even upbraid him for his selfishness, and in such a case he would hardly know how to defend himself. Altogether, he was passing a *mauvais quart d'heure*.

Still, he was a man who could both act and speak gracefully when he chose. And when the weary period of waiting was brought to an end by the entrance of Luttrell, he was fully prepared to play his embarrassing part well. Perhaps he was assisted in his efforts by the genuine sympathy which Luttrell's haggard appearance called forth in him. He hardly recognised in him the same man to whom he had bade good-bye a few days ago—so deeply had he been changed by the receipt of Lenore's fatal letter.

'I can hardly say how sorry I am to see you under such circumstances, Luttrell,' he said gravely, as they shook hands. 'But do you think it was quite wise on your part to come here? It

seems to me you will only be giving yourself fresh pain.'

'I don't know that it was wise,' answered the other simply.

'But when I wrote that letter, it seemed to me that I would have laid down my life to see her once more. If she does not wish it—if it will grieve her too much, I am willing to forego—' His voice faltered, so that he could not finish the sentence. He turned away his head for a moment, and then added, in a low tone, 'You do not know how I love her. She could not do otherwise than she has done, and I know I was never worthy of her, in more senses than one. But there are some things in this world that can never be set right again; I think our parting will be one of them. I don't want to speak evil of the dead, but I believe that old man who revenged himself on me through her, will have to answer for it hereafter.'

‘Lenore certainly seemed to think it best that you should not see each other again, at first,’ said Mr Chester presently. ‘But now that you are here, I think she would not wish you to leave without the painful satisfaction of saying good-bye. She is in the drawing-room; will you go to her? And, forgive me, my dear fellow,’ he added, laying his hand on Luttrell’s arm, ‘but I have been through these kind of scenes in my own youth. Make the parting as brief as you can; it will be so much the better for both of you.’

I question very much whether Luttrell heard this sage advice, being too absorbed by his own emotion. But as Mr Chester went back to his old post on the hearthrug, he congratulated himself upon the fact that his own experience had enabled him to give such good counsel to a young fellow in distress.

He was also vastly pleased at the way in which Luttrell had acted in this brief but trying interview,—no assumption of having been injured—no veiled accusations of selfishness on the part of the family in accepting the sacrifice.

‘The fellow is a perfect gentleman—nobody can deny that,’ he told his wife, with great emphasis, later on. ‘I always held with you that it was a bad match, and I’m glad it has been broken off, somehow. But there’s not a man in England who could have behaved better under the circumstances.’

The house seemed silent as the grave as Luttrell crossed the large, old-fashioned hall to the drawing-room. How well he could recall his sensations on the first day he had set foot in the place, flushed with triumph at the knowledge that all difficulties had been smoothed over, and

that he was free to wear for life the fair flower of womanhood he had won, with such pride in the winning. Should he ever be able to blot out the memory of that sweet, glad face, that saucy, sunny smile, those lustrous eyes melting with the tender light of love? Could he ever look back calmly on the hour when he had held her in his arms, and pressed his first kiss upon her lips—when she had given herself to him in all the pure and ardent innocence of her girlish love?

Noiselessly he turned the handle of the door. But she had heard his foot-step and stood awaiting him, with the flush of eager expectation on her cheek. Then, as he came forward, she uttered his name with a low cry, and threw herself into his arms.

For a long time not a word was spoken by either. She lay in his arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. Nor was

he, I think, altogether dry-eyed. He stroked her bright, silken hair with a hand that trembled like a woman's. But the violence of her weeping seemed to increase with that caressing action, till he himself grew alarmed at her grief.

‘Oh, my darling! how wrong it was of me to come,’ he whispered; ‘how selfish of me to expose you to this.’

Somehow these words seemed to lay the tempest.

‘Oh no, no; do not say that,’ she answered brokenly, as she sank down on a sofa with him at her side. ‘I thought it better at first, but I should have written to you to come if you had not done so of your own accord. After what we have been to each other, we could not have parted in such a way. Oh, Keith, I did not know how I loved you till I had to make that choice. You believe me, do you not, when I tell you

that I have not done this for my own benefit? I will not touch a penny of the money for myself; to me it is accursed.'

'My poor, little, ill-used love, I never doubted you,' he answered tenderly. 'Placed as you were, you could not choose otherwise than you have done. Never think that I blamed you for a second. I shall always think of you as the brave girl who would have married a poor man because she loved him, if a cruel fate had not made it impossible.'

Painful as that last meeting was, I think there was a sweetness even in its sadness which neither would have foregone when they came to recall it afterwards. Never had they poured out their hearts more freely to each other, never had they given more fervent expression to their love than on this day, when any lingering remnants of pride or reserve were swept away by the sense of their

mutual loss. Her temperament had always been frank and open ; the arts of the coquette had never been hers ; and from the moment she gave herself to him she had never practised any concealment of her feelings. But to-day her whole soul was bared to his gaze, and he trembled for her future as he saw the strength of her love for him. Was it possible that in the narrow world alone open to woman, she would ever find oblivion ?

How swiftly the minutes flew ! Much as they had said to each other, there still seemed so much more to say. But the strain was growing greater than either could bear. He saw it, and took her in his arms for the last farewell.

Suddenly she drew back from his embrace, and with trembling fingers cut off one wandering, sunny curl from the glossy tresses he loved so well, and held it out to him.

‘Keep this in memory of your poor little sweetheart who loved you so dearly,’ she said, smiling bravely through her tears. ‘And, Keith dear, in the years to come, when you are happy with another woman, keep a little corner in your heart for me. Remember that there is always one in the world who will pray for your happiness, and who would have thought no sacrifice too great for you if it had only affected herself. God bless you, my own, own love !’

‘My darling,’ he whispered, ‘the greatest happiness I can wish to both of us is—to forget as speedily as possible.’

For the last time their tears mingled ; for the last time her pure arms were clasped round him, and her head nestled in its old resting-place ; for the last time their lips met in a long farewell kiss. Gently he unwound her arms,

and laid her on the couch, then turned towards the door.

He walked down the hall with slow, uncertain steps, like a man in a dream. For a moment he halted at the door of the library, then passed on. He could not speak a word to man or woman after that miserable parting. Mechanically he got into the fly that was waiting to take him back to the station, and bade the man drive on.

The train bore him back to London at express speed ; but for many a mile the landscape looked blurred and misty to his eyes, as he felt in fancy those soft arms clinging round him, and heard the sweet tearful voice tell him to keep that slender tress of golden hair 'in memory of his little sweetheart.'

Katie and Gertrude watched his departure from an upper chamber. To their

credit be it noted, both the girls wept copiously. Katie's tears owed their origin, most probably, to that fellow-feeling which is said to make us 'wondrous kind.' It required no excessive stretch of the imagination to put herself in the place of Lenore, and Joseph Chumleigh in the place of Luttrell. As Gerty had enjoyed no experience of lovers nor love-making, her case was not exactly parallel. She must have wept from excessive sensibility, and that ready sympathy which is the common endowment of her charming sex. But, being of an eminently practical nature, she composed herself sooner of the two, and proceeded to regard the painful event from the most cheerful point of view.

'It must be an awfully hard thing to say good-bye to a man who, if things had followed their natural course, would have been your husband in a few weeks' time.

But, on the other hand, it was a wretched match for Lenore. And, although Keith was very fascinating and attractive, it has long been my opinion that there was a want of stability in his character which did not bode well for the future. Of some men—of Joseph, for instance—one can predict with tolerable certainty that they will make excellent husbands. But with Luttrell it was just a toss up whether he would turn out good or bad. Don't you think so ?'

Katie dried her tears, and looked thoughtful when her sister put this question to her.

'It is hardly fair to compare Joseph with Luttrell,' she answered at length, in a voice of wondrous gravity. 'Joseph is a man out of a thousand ; but, then, Joseph has led such a quiet life, while the other has knocked about the world, and, I daresay, been pretty wild in his

young days. I quite agree with you that there is less risk about Joseph than Luttrell. Any woman who marries a handsome man always runs a risk,' concluded this sage young person.

'And Lenore is just the last kind of girl who ought to run any risk in marriage,' added Gertrude quickly. She was trying to convince herself and her sister that what had happened was for the best, and took up the first line of argument that came to her hand. 'She would make a perfect idol of her husband, exactly as she does of little Syd. And petty troubles that you and I should pass over and laugh at, would become acute miseries to her. I'm sure it wouldn't have been all *couleur de rose* with Luttrell. He had a peculiar, caressing manner towards women. That is a charming thing in a lover, but not quite so charming in a husband. He would have been

airing it towards other women after he was married, and how would she have liked that ?'

Katie sighed sympathetically. To look on while your husband was making himself agreeable to other women must be a terrible thing, she thought. At the same time, her imagination did not help her to realise this picture so vividly as some others. There was nothing of the gay Lothario about Mr Chumleigh. His achievements amongst the fair sex up to the present had not been those of a mighty conqueror. Gauging the future from the past, Katie was inclined to think that whatever troubles married life might bring in its train, jealousy would not be amongst them.

'We must go to her,' said Gerty presently. 'We can't do much good, but it would be inhuman not to try and console her. Do you know, Katie,' she added,

with a sudden access of deep feeling in her tone, 'I do think it was a refinement of cruelty for that wretched old uncle of ours to pick out Lenore for the victim, knowing, as he must have known, that she is moulded differently from any of us. You or I, now, would soon have got over the loss of a lover. For my own part, I'm sure it would have cost me less to give up twenty lovers than it will Lenore to give up her one. Let us go to her at once.'

They went down the stairs very slowly ; for, although their hearts were overflowing with sympathy, they felt the hopelessness of their task. The commonplaces of condolence, although uttered in the tenderest of tones by those we love, must always sound more or less of a mockery in the first moment of a bitter bereavement.

But when they noiselessly turned the handle of the drawing-room door and peeped in, they found that their office had

been already anticipated. Lenore was kneeling on the floor by a sofa, her head buried in the cushions, and little Sydney, with his arms tightly wound round her neck, was entreating her in heartfelt tones not to cry any more. The little fellow had felt instinctively that there was trouble in the air for his favourite sister, and had made his way to her the moment the coast was clear. So absorbed were the pair—the one in her grief, the other in his childish efforts to restore her to a more equable frame of mind—that they were utterly unconscious of the intruders.

For a minute the girls looked at each other, silently inquiring with their eyes what they should do. Then Gertrude beckoned the other with her finger, and they stole away as quietly as they had entered. They felt that Sydney would be a much more effectual consoler than either of them. For they knew well enough

that, when she had been undergoing that painful struggle, it must have been her love for her little baby-brother, her desire to make his future bright, which had turned the scale in their favour, and against Luttrell.

The last thing that night, Gertrude stole into her bedroom. Exhausted by her emotion, Lenore was sleeping, as it seemed, peacefully. The tears which she had shed just before 'nature's kind nurse' had lulled her to rest, were still glittering on the silken eyelashes of the closed and wearied eyes. But over the poor child's lips there seemed to hover the shadow of a smile. In the blessed world of sleep, she had forgotten for a few hours her grief, and was dreaming perchance of the happy days so rudely ended.

Gertrude's own eyes filled at the sight. She looked so calm and peaceful now, in that brief respite from the cruel sorrow

which had fallen so swiftly upon her young life. And the rosy dawn of to-morrow's light, that would bring joy and hope to so many hearts, would waken her back to renewed grief for her lost lover. Gerty bent over the still form, and just touched the sunny hair, floating over the pillow, with her lips.

‘My poor darling, I fear we have been very cruel,’ she said to herself, in a remorseful whisper. ‘To me or Katie it would have been one little pang, and done with. But you are so different.’

So ended the romance of Lenore's youth. And the cruel part of it was that the world seemed to go on just the same to all but her. Even nature, as if to mock her aching heart, dressed herself out in her brightest and fairest. Never had the skies looked clearer, never had the sun shone more bril-

liantly than in the days when her lover's departure seemed to have withdrawn all the brightness and fairness for ever from her life.

For the first week or two she went about like a person in a dream. Truly her spirit was in the past, and only held communion with its sweet, sad memories. What recked she of the present? What cared she for the future? The tender grace of the olden days—they seemed so far off now—could never return to her.

The weeks passed on, and by degrees the claims of every-day life began to press themselves more strongly upon her, and slowly she came out of that trance-like state of grief. The thought of Luttrell was ever in her mind, by day and night. But somehow she found herself entering into the trivial, daily talk of her sisters, and going about the

old pursuits and avocations in a mechanical kind of way. As a tired child, drowsily opening its eyes at its nurse's call, prepares to obey the accustomed summons, so did she slowly respond to the imperious voice of the youth that was still strong within her, and would not be stifled to death under the crushing memories of the past.

The cruellest ordeal of all was when she stood at the altar of the old Deepdale Church as her sister's bridesmaid. An old friend of the family had offered to take her away for the time of the wedding. But she had decided that she would stay with her own. Absence from the scene could not have conjured away the thoughts which that wedding day must have brought forth—that day which was to have witnessed two marriages, which was to have united her to the man she loved so passionately.

It was a very quiet affair, not only for Lenore's sake, but on account of its following so speedily in the wake of Sir Herbert's death. A few of the most intimate friends of both the families, including Robert Farquhar—these were all the guests.

So short a time ago, and Robert's doom seemed to have been sealed by Lenore's acceptance of Luttrell. And when he met her again a few weeks later, on Katie's wedding day, the barrier was gone. But whatever elation he might have felt at the knowledge that there was still hope left for him, died away when he looked on her and saw how deeply she had suffered.

'God help you, my child! I wish I could bear it for you,' he said to her.

She thanked him with a little wet smile; and that was all that passed between them on the subject.

And so Katie Chester and Joseph Chumleigh were made man and wife. And when the newly-married pair had departed on their bridal tour, and the guests had all left, and the strange silence which succeeds unusual festivity had fallen on the house, a broken-hearted girl crept up to her chamber, and wept bitterly over the loss of her 'love's young dream.'

END OF VOL. II.

